

Microsoft restricts chat rooms

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

SEATTLE — Microsoft is shutting down Internet chat services in most of its markets around the world and limiting the service in the United States to help reduce criminal solicitations of children through online discussions.

The changes will take effect Oct. 14, Microsoft said Tuesday in an announcement from Europe.

In most of its 34 markets in Europe, Latin America and Asia, Microsoft MSN has chosen to



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simply shut down the service, the Redmond, Wash.-based software company said. However, MSN will continue to offer chat services to users in the United States, Canada, Japan and Brazil.

In the United States, MSN will require users of its chat service to subscribe to at least one other

paid MSN service. That way, the company will have credit card numbers to make it easier to track users who violate MSN's terms of use. The sessions will not be moderated, Microsoft said.

In Canada and Japan, the company will offer some moderated chat rooms.

Saudi forces kill man suspected of terror threats to United States

BY ADNAN MALIK
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

JIDDAH, SAUDI ARABIA — Saudi security forces killed three suspected militants, including an al-Qaida-linked man wanted by the FBI for possible terror threats against the United States, in an apartment-building shootout Tuesday, the Interior Ministry said.

One security official was also killed in the hourslong gunfight at the three-story residential building in Jizan, about 600 miles south of the Saudi capital, Riyadh, the ministry said in a statement carried by the official Saudi Press Agency.

Two suspected militants also were arrested.

The agency said one of the Saudi men killed was Sultan Jubran Sultan al-Qahtani, also known as Zubayr al-Rimi, 29. The FBI has linked the Saudi native to possible terror threats against the United States, and he also appears on a Saudi list of militants connected to May 12 suicide bombings in Riyadh that killed 25 people and nine attackers, according to a Saudi Interior Ministry official.

A U.S. official, speaking on the condition of anonymity, described al-Rimi as the chief deputy of the former top al-Qaida man in Saudi Arabia. That man, Abu Bakr al-Azdi, surrendered to Saudi authorities June 26.

The early-morning raid was intended to capture militants planning a terror attack, according to an official statement on Saudi state television earlier Tuesday.

Details of the firefight were sketchy, as news often is in this kingdom whose rulers keep a tight lid on the press.

Security officials initially said the gunmen had taken several foreign hostages at King Fahd Hospital. The Interior Ministry statement and later television reports did not mention hostages, but Al-Jazeera television's Web site said all hostages were released.

The building where the militants were apparently holed up is part of a housing complex for the hospital's employees, the ministry said. About 3,000 people live in the complex.

"Security forces made every effort to control the terrorists without inflicting harm on the residents in the building and in the housing complex, despite what the terrorists did when they started firing heavily on security men," the ministry statement said.

Al-Arabiya television quoted a security official as saying at least one of those arrested was on a list of 19 alleged militants wanted after police discovered a weapons cache near Riyadh in May. A week later, on May 12, suicide bombings killed 26 people and nine attackers at residential compounds

housing Westerners in Riyadh.

The 19 men are believed to be behind the Riyadh bombings and in close contact with the al-Qaida terror network, Saudi officials have said. At least 11 of the 19 have been killed or arrested.

The FBI issued a bulletin Sept. 5 saying it was searching worldwide for al-Rimi, another Saudi, a Moroccan and a Tunisian in connection with possible terrorist threats against the United States.

The bulletin came as the FBI raised concerns that terrorists might try to poison food or water supplies, and senior bureau officials said al-Qaida was determined to attack Americans at home even though the organization appeared to have a relatively small U.S. presence.

The Saudi government has cracked down on Islamic militants since the May 12 bombings and repeatedly and publicly denounced terrorism and Islamic extremism. More than 200 suspects have been arrested and more than a dozen killed in a series of high-profile police raids since then.

The kingdom has "confronted terrorists, encircled them, disbanded their bases and is still pursuing their criminal remnants and will be victorious, God willing," King Fahd said Tuesday in a speech read on his behalf at a conference in Kazakhstan, the Saudi Press Agency reported.

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CROSS INTO THE BLUE

Teen fires gun at school, shot and wounded by police officers

BY NICHOLAS K. GERANIOS
ASSOCIATED PRESS WRITER

SPOKANE, WASH. — A troubled teenager who was critically wounded by officers after he fired a gun at school was trying to commit suicide, police said Tuesday.

Sean Fitzpatrick, 16, left a page-and-a-half suicide note at home before Monday's shooting, saying he wanted to be shot by police, police Chief Roger Bragdon said. He also made suicidal statements during the 20 minutes he talked with a police negotiator, Bragdon said.

"There is no doubt in my mind that the young man intended to commit suicide by having us do it," Bragdon said.

"He was talking suicide from the very beginning."

Bragdon declined to reveal the contents of the note, saying only the teen was explicit about his emotional pain and depression. Bragdon could not say why the student chose his high school for the showdown.

Fitzpatrick was shot three

times by SWAT team officers who fired almost simultaneously when the student raised a 9mm semiautomatic handgun toward them, Bragdon said. Fitzpatrick was shot in the jaw, stomach and arm and was in critical condition Tuesday at Sacred Heart Medical Center.

Bragdon said the suicide note was clear Fitzpatrick did not intend to harm others.

The gun was obtained from the boy's home, he said.

Fitzpatrick's parents, Angel Fitzpatrick and Linda Scheering of Fairfield, a town 30 miles south of Spokane, were brought to the school but had not spoken to their son, officials said.

The parents apologized to the community Tuesday in a statement released by family attorney Carl Hueber. The boy had no previous criminal problems, and his parents were cooperating with police, Hueber said in the statement.

"He was apparently suffering from severe mental problems

which had not been recognized by his family, friends or teachers," the statement said.

Bragdon said Fitzpatrick entered a science classroom shortly after 11 a.m. Monday, ordered student teacher and several students to leave and fired once into a wall. He took no hostages.

The boy also sprayed the room with retardant from fire extinguishers. Officers could see the boy because he had propped open a door, and they talked with him, Bragdon said.

However, Fitzpatrick suddenly stopped talking, put on his jacket, and drew the pistol from a pants pocket, Bragdon said.

"They knew it couldn't be stopped," Bragdon said of the shooting.

Authorities said it is too early to say if Fitzpatrick will face criminal charges if he recovers.

School Superintendent Brian Benzel cited privacy laws in refusing to release any information about Fitzpatrick's school performance and activities.

Bus driver gets 4-year sentence

BY MICHAEL RUBINKAM
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

PHILADELPHIA — A school bus

driver who stashed a rifle behind his seat and set out for the nation's capital with 13 children on a bizarre, unauthorized field trip

was sentenced Tuesday to four years in prison.

Otto Nuss, 65, pleaded guilty to federal kidnapping charges in June.

"The only thing I want to say is I'm sorry to the children and their families and their parents and also to me," he said in court Tuesday.

Nuss' trip in January 2001 touched off a frantic six-hour search and alarmed parents at the Berks Christian School in Birdsboro. None of the children was harmed.

Nuss was said to be agitated by the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks. He told the students he was going to show them that he was against Osama bin Laden.

He had taken psychiatric medication for three decades but went off it on his doctor's recommendation shortly before the trip, authorities said.

The students, ages 7 to 15, had boarded the bus for their daily 20-minute ride to school, but Nuss instead announced he was taking them on a field trip to Washington. The trip included stops to eat lunch and use the bathroom. Students said they never felt in danger, nor did any try to escape.

In the afternoon, a seemingly lost Nuss pulled into the parking lot of a discount store in Maryland and surrendered to an off-duty police officer who was in uniform.

About two dozen friends and family members packed the courtroom to support Nuss, whom they described as gentle and hard-working.

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