

Troops pursue escaping al-Qaida fighters

By The Associated Press
INTERNATIONAL

BAGRAM, Afghanistan — U.S. and Canadian troops pursued four al-Qaida fighters through the mountains of eastern Afghanistan today after the enemy slipped away following a gunbattle that erupted during the mopping up operations of the biggest U.S.-led offensive of the Afghan war.

Helicopters, commandos and ground troops scanned the valley passes to track stragglers after the brief exchange of fire Thursday. Coalition troops clearing caves and bunkers in the Shah-e-Kot valley also killed three enemy fighters after a separate 90-minute gunbattle as the remnants of al-Qaida fighters struggled to survive in the aftermath of Operation Anaconda. "Today is March 15, so here's a sooth for the al-Qaida," said Maj. Bryan Hilferty, a spokesman for the 10th Mountain Division. "If you come out of your holes, I'd say beware the Ides of March."

The search came after a separate incident in which coalition troops subdued a cell of suspected al-Qaida or Taliban fighters with anti-tank weapons, grenades, heavy machine guns and small arms fire. There were no coalition casualties, said the Canadian Press news agency, which has a reporter with the Canadian troops.

JERUSALEM — Israeli tanks pulled out of the West Bank town of Ramallah early today, witnesses said, hours after U.S. envoy Anthony Zinni began another effort to stop Palestinian-Israeli violence.

With the United States exerting strong pressure on the Israelis to leave all areas under complete Palestinian control, Secretary of State Colin Powell spoke by telephone with Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon ahead of Zinni's arrival in the region Thursday night.

During a meeting with Sharon at the prime minister's Jerusalem residence, Zinni repeated the U.S. demand that Israel withdraw from all parts of Palestinian-controlled territory, said Cabinet minister Tzipi Livni, who took part in the meeting.

She said Sharon told the U.S. envoy that Israel would withdraw troops as soon as its anti-terrorism operations are completed.

In a statement, the Israeli military said today that soldiers had pulled out of the towns of Ramallah, Tulkarem and Qalqilya in the West Bank and a hill opposite the Bureij refugee camp in the Gaza Strip.

NATIONAL

HOUSTON — Calling the woman who drowned her five children in the bathtub a wonderful mother, tearful

ap news capsules

relatives begged a jury not to impose the death sentence.

"I'm here pleading for her life," Andrea Yates' 73-year-old mother, Jutta Karin Kennedy, told jurors as she cried.

"I've lost seven people in one year," said Kennedy, referring to the slaying of her five grandchildren, the death of her husband and the conviction of her daughter in the children's deaths.

Defense attorneys called Yates' family, friends and a psychiatrist to testify Thursday in an attempt to save her life.

Prosecutors offered no witnesses or evidence. All of the evidence was admitted during the trial, assistant district attorney Joe Owmbly said.

Yates, 37, was convicted Tuesday of two capital murder charges for killing three of the children. She is now in the penalty phase of her trial and could be sentenced to life in prison or death by injection.

District Judge Belinda Hill said deliberations would begin today after closing arguments.

LOS ANGELES — Before both sides rested their cases over the dog-mauling of a San Francisco woman, a dog behavior expert challenged a claim by defendant Marjorie Knoller that she threw herself on her neighbor in a desperate attempt to save her from the fatal attack.

Randall Lockwood testified Thursday that Knoller was not as close as she has claimed to the attack on lacrosse coach Diane Whipple by a presa canario dog.

"She may have been nearby but she was not in very close proximity," said Lockwood, a research official with the U.S. Humane Society.

Lockwood said that after listening to Knoller's testimony and analyzing evidence, he would have expected her to receive more severe bites than she did from the dog, named Bane.

Knoller's injuries "suggest she was at some distance and Bane was giving her warning bites to back off and let him do what he felt was his job. ... He essentially was telling her to leave him alone."

On cross-examination, Lockwood was asked whether Knoller was trying to prevent the attack.

"She was present," Lockwood said tersely.

CONCORD, N.H. — Outbreaks of pink eye have spread through the campuses of Dartmouth College and Princeton University, leaving hundreds of students with swollen, irritated eyes as they begin their spring breaks.

positions, including the Supreme Court.

"If the White House persists in sending us nominees who threaten to throw the courts out of whack with the country, we have no choice but to vote no," said Sen. Charles Schumer, D-N.Y.

Democrats used their one-vote majority in the Senate Judiciary Committee on Thursday to kill Bush's nomination of U.S. District Judge Charles Pickering to the U.S. Appeals Court in New Orleans, one step below the Supreme Court.

"This cannot continue," said Senate Republican Leader Trent Lott of Mississippi, Pickering's friend of 40 years. "We cannot let stand a plan to deny President Bush his nominees to the court."

Bush wanted the committee to let the full Senate vote on the nomination. Pickering probably would have won a majority there, because at least three Democrats in the 50-49 Senate had said they would vote for him. Majority Leader Tom Daschle, D-S.D., has said repeatedly he would block any attempt to vote on Pickering without committee approval.

WASHINGTON — As the House prepares to vote on next year's budget, President Bush was promoting his plan for big Pentagon spending increases in the embrace of popular special operations troops integral to the war in Afghanistan.

Some experts fear the outbreaks of conjunctivitis could spread as the students fan out across the country and beyond.

"Some students are just developing pink eye now. There is a possibility it will blossom in the different places they go during their break," said Dr. Jack Turco of Dartmouth's student health center.

Nearly 500 Dartmouth students have reported symptoms of pink eye since January, and another 500 students may have had the infection and not reported it, Turco said.

At Princeton, more than 250 students have reported symptoms of pink eye since officials began tracking the infections last month.

Pink eye can cause a pink or red discoloration of the eyes, irritation, swelling, blurry vision, sticky eyelids and increased sensitivity to light. The infection, which can be treated with antibiotic ointment, typically lasts three to four days.

WASHINGTON

WASHINGTON — In rejecting President Bush's promotion of a Mississippi judge to a federal appeals court, Senate Democrats put the White House on notice they intend to block strict conservatives from key judicial

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At Fort Bragg, N.C., for the day today, Bush was rallying military men and women behind his call to raise defense spending by \$48 billion to \$379 billion, the largest increase for the Pentagon in two decades.

Bush has proposed using the money to give service personnel pay raises, acquire more high-tech precision weapons and build missile defenses.

Aides said the president wanted to use his morning speech in Fayetteville, N.C., to update local residents on the war against terror and thank servicemen and women from Fort Bragg and Pope Air Force Base for their contributions.

Bush also was to have lunch with troops and see a tactical demonstration of training exercises by the special operations forces, or commandos, headquartered at Fort Bragg.

WASHINGTON — Tipper Gore is considering an overture from Demo-

crats to run for the Senate seat her husband gave up to become vice president, sources close to her say.

The sources, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said Democrats urged Mrs. Gore to run after Sen. Fred Thompson, R-Tenn., said last week he would not seek re-election.

One source said Mrs. Gore believed she owed it to herself to give some thought to a run.

Her husband, Al Gore, held the Senate seat from 1985 to 1993, when he became President Clinton's vice president. Al Gore said immediately after Thompson made his announcement that he would not run for the Senate.

One Democratic operative close to the Gores, speaking on condition of anonymity, said Mrs. Gore had received a handful of overtures from Democrats urging her to consider running, and Mrs. Gore was weighing them.

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