

15 Al Qaida suspects surrender in south Yemen

Officials say group gave up to police in front of elders

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Aden: Fifteen suspected Al Qaida members have surrendered to the governor of the restive south Yemen province of Abyan, a security official said yesterday.

The 15 surrendered to Ahmad Al Mayassari on Monday in the presence of tribal leaders and their relatives, the official said, adding that the men had joined Al Qaida about a year ago.

"Some of the men played an important role in the recent clashes between Al Qaida and the army in Loder and Mudia," two towns in Abyan, the official said.

Local authorities had pressured the families of the men to obtain their surrender, sources close to the governor said.

The defence ministry's 26sep.net news website quoted a local administration spokesman as saying that six of the men who surrendered are dangerous and are on a Yemeni wanted list.

Tribal authorities are negotiating for the surrender of six other alleged Al Qaida members, including the jihadist group's local leader Abdul Monaam Al Fahtani, the spokesman said, adding that the talks could be concluded shortly.

Abyan and adjacent Shabwa province have become major fields of operation for Al Qaida as the central government in Sana'a struggles to impose its control on the region's heavily armed tribes.

Aden and Abyan are set to host part of the 20th Gulf Football Championship involving Yemen, Iraq and six Gulf monarchies from November 22 to December 5.

The United States has become increasingly concerned about the threat posed by Islamist militancy in the ancestral homeland of Osama Bin Laden, and has warned of the potential for Yemen to become a regrouping ground for Al Qaida.

Yemen has intensified a military campaign against the network's local franchise, Al Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula, since it claimed responsibility for a failed bid on

Christmas Day last year to blow up a US-bound airliner by a Nigerian allegedly trained in Yemen.

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