



PHOTO: AFP

US troops, left, keep a defensive position at the main street of Fallujah where they shot dead 13 Iraqis at a pro-Saddam rally yesterday. Wounded Iraqi men, right, lie on their hospital beds.

US troops mow down Saddam revellers

13 including six children killed, 75 injured during leader's birthday celebration

AFP, Fallujah
 US troops shot dead 13 Iraqis, at least six of them children, during a protest to mark Saddam Hussein's birthday, witnesses said yesterday.

Witnesses in the town of Fallujah, west of Baghdad, told AFP that US troops had opened fire late Monday on demonstrators celebrating Saddam's 66th birthday, killing 13 and wounding 75.

"The shooting broke out when 500 protestors carrying portraits of Saddam and Iraqi flags approached a school manned by US troops," said Mohammed Hamid, a resident of the town, 50 kilometres west of the capital.

Another witness who asked not to be identified said the US soldiers were "not threatened by the demonstrators."

Of the 13, dead who were swiftly buried yesterday, six were children aged just seven or eight, the second witness said.



Iraq's ex-oil minister and key arms expert gives in

AFP, As-Saliyah
 Former Iraqi oil minister Amer Mohammad Rashid al-Ubaidi, a core figure in Iraq's clandestine weapons programme, has surrendered to US-led coalition forces, US Central Command said yesterday.

He "surrendered Monday and is currently in coalition custody," the Central Command (Centcom) said in a statement.

The 14th of the "most wanted" Iraqis to fall into American hands, he is identified as the six of spades in the pack of cards issued to troops to help track them down.

As well as being at the forefront of the development of Iraq's missiles and the systematic campaign to conceal it from the world, Rashid was married to Rihab Taba, known as "Dr Germ", the head of Iraq's secret biological weapons programme.



Teesta talks stall on Indian foot-dragging

Sharing of 54 common rivers also becomes uncertain

JULHAS RIPON
 India's dillydallying on reaching an accord on water sharing of the Teesta river has made equitable sharing of waters of all the 54 common rivers uncertain, sources said.

Article IX of the Ganges Water Sharing Treaty with India provides that treaty would be made for sharing of waters of all the common rivers.

Army men maul steamer crew at Barisal

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barisal
 A contingent of army swooped on the crew of a steamer at Barisal yesterday morning and beat them up as a sequel to an earlier clash.

According to the manager of the Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Corporation, Barisal, two army men boarded the packed steamer, PS Turn, at Chandpur on Monday night on its way to Barisal. They demanded accommodation in the steamer which the staff failed to provide.

US to pull out troops from Saudi Arabia

LONDON, Bbc Online

The United States has said that virtually all its troops, except some training personnel, are to be pulled out of Saudi Arabia.

The decision was confirmed by US Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld during a joint news conference with Saudi Defence Minister Prince Sultan.

Both men stressed that there were no differences between their countries and their co-operation would continue.

Ever since the 1991 Gulf war, the US has had about 5,000 troops stationed in Saudi Arabia - a figure that rose to 10,000 during the recent conflict in Iraq.

The BBC's Middle East analyst Roger Hardy says this is a strategic shift of great political as well as military significance.

Technically US troops there have been part of Operation Southern Watch, which has enforced the no-fly zone over southern Iraq set up after 1991.

But our correspondent says the US troops have become a potent symbol of Washington's role in the region, and many Saudis see them as proof of the country's subservience

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Notice
 To accommodate a special supplement on Page 5 Letters to the Editor have been published on Page 9 in today's edition.
 --Editor

Dhaka pits zero duty access against Delhi's free trade offer

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

India yesterday proposed that Bangladesh consider a free trade arrangement, while the latter reiterated a request for duty-free access of its goods under certain categories into the Indian market.

yesterday afternoon.

The official talks between the two next-door neighbours in the city yesterday also discussed early operation of Dhaka-Agartala bus service and establishment of a train link between Bangabandhu Bridge and Shialda in Kolkata.

Emerging out of the meeting, both Chowdhury and Sibal described the meeting fruitful and held in a friendly atmosphere. Sibal said they discussed all the bilateral issues, even those with differences of opinion.

Officials present at the meeting later said Bangladesh agreed to have a look at the Indian proposal provided India allows the rest of Bangladeshi products under the 25-category duty-free access to its market.

On the Indian proposal for a free trade agreement (FTA) with Bangladesh, Sibal said India has similar arrangements with Sri Lanka and proposed the same to Thailand and ASEAN, the Southeast Asian economic block. Sibal, however, noted that such an agreement could not be reached overnight.

The foreign secretary-level talks between Bangladesh and India, first since December 2000, also touched on bilateral issues including irritants like 'push-in' and 'illegal migration'.

Trade between the two countries is titled heavily in favour of India with an annual official trade gap of \$1 billion.

The meeting decided that the Indo-Bangla Joint Economic Commission (JEC) will sit in middle of this year, while another meeting will also be held soon to resolve the border problems.

Bangladesh's foreign secretary told reporters that "we'll be able to resolve the demarcation of the last remaining 6.5 kilometres of area on Indo-Bangla borderline and today

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