



Firefighters talk to an injured person among the rubble of a small buffet restaurant in Harbiye, in the European quarter of Istanbul, destroyed by a strong explosion yesterday. Seven people, one of them seriously, were injured in the explosion, which officials say was triggered by a gas leak.

US troops on shooting spree after attack in Iraq

REUTERS, Falluja

Gunmen fired anti-tank rockets at a US armoured vehicle in the tense Iraqi town of Falluja, sending US troops into a shooting spree that killed two Iraqis, residents said yesterday.

There was no immediate comment from the US military on the incident.

Residents said they heard several explosions in the centre of Falluja, 32 miles northwest of Baghdad, at around 11 p.m. (3 p.m. EDT) on Wednesday night where a US armoured personnel carrier (APC) was parked.

A Reuters correspondent who visited the scene on Thursday said he saw the propellers of anti-tank weapons at the scene.

It was not immediately clear if the APC was hit and there was no word of any US casualties.

Residents said after the attack, US tanks randomly fired toward the city centre, killing two passengers of a pickup truck travelling some 300 yards from the scene.

"They went crazy, they fired everywhere," Safi Jaber, a witness, said.

US soldiers later stopped an ambulance trying to approach the truck and a tank rammed the vehicle, the residents said.

The wreckage of the white truck was still at the site on Thursday.

Residents identified one of the Iraqi victims as a 19-year-old man called Hady Jaber.

"His wedding was supposed to be today," Khalil Ibrahim, an electrical engineer, told Reuters.

Many shops were damaged by tank fire and a car spare parts shop was completely destroyed.

The overnight incident is

expected to further inflame tension in the conservative Sunni Muslim town that was the scene of clashes between US troops and local residents after the fall of former president Saddam Hussein last month.

At least 15 Iraqis died in the clashes between demonstrators and US troops last month. On May 1, a grenade attack wounded seven US soldiers in the town.

Iyad Qubaisi, standing in front of his ruined spare parts shop, said: "Saddam never ruined our shops. Is this the liberation (President Bush) talks about?"

Residents said Americans barged into their homes searching while firing randomly all around the centre of the city.

Troops withdrew from the industrial area where the incident had taken place, but continued to patrol other parts of the city.

Al-Qaeda tape raises fears of fresh attacks

REUTERS, Dubai

A call for holy war on Americans and Jews, apparently made by Osama bin Laden's top aide, raised fears of a new terror attack, as a source said Saudi Arabia foiled a Sept. 11-style hijack.

US military bases went on their highest alert following bloody suicide bombings in Saudi Arabia and Morocco last week.

Al-Jazeera television aired an audio tape it said was from Ayman al-Zawahiri, bin Laden's top lieutenant, who urged Muslims to strike at the embassies and commercial interests of the United States, Britain, Australia and, oddly, Norway.

A Saudi source said a suicide airliner attack had been thwarted by the arrest of three Moroccans, rejecting comments by Interior Minister Prince Nayef that no such plot had existed. Britain's envoy said the oil-rich kingdom was riskier than ever.

Egypt tightened security near embassies, foreigners' homes and tourist sites, anxious it might suffer the next blow after suicide bombings killed 34 people in Riyadh, mostly foreigners, and 41 in Casablanca.

US officials said the Defence Intelligence Agency had raised its

warning of possible terror attack against military facilities and bases in the United States to its highest level.

The officials said additional anti-aircraft missile systems would be deployed and air patrols in the Washington area increased.

A Saudi source said three armed Moroccan al-Qaeda suspects had planned to hijack a civilian plane and crash into landmarks in the kingdom, but were arrested at Jeddah airport Monday.

Meanwhile United States has voiced its concern to Qatar over the broadcast by the al-Jazeera satellite television channel of an alleged message from a senior al-Qaeda leader.

US Secretary of State Colin Powell termed the broadcast unfortunate and said that giving air time to terrorists just heightened tensions.

Mr Powell said the tape "spreads more hatred throughout the world".

"We think it was unfortunate that al-Jazeera ran the tape. All it does is heighten tension throughout the region to allow this kind of terrorist to have access to the airwaves," he added. Mr Powell said he did not know whether the tape was authentic or accurate.

Taiwan reels from record number of SARS cases

AFP, Taipei

Taiwan's SARS crisis escalated yesterday after a record 65 new cases and eight deaths were recorded in the wake of an island-wide travel alert issued by the World Health Organisation (WHO).

The new cases - nearly double the previous daily record - took Taiwan's toll from Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome to 483 infections and 60 fatalities, according to the Department of Health.

The escalation of the crisis came after the WHO issued an advisory in Geneva late Wednesday warning visitors against non-essential travel to all areas of Taiwan, extending a previous alert restricted to capital Taipei.

Taiwan now has the fastest growing outbreak of the mysterious virus which first emerged in southern China in November before spreading to some 30 countries, killing nearly 700 people.

Taiwan's foreign ministry said Thursday 48 countries had issued

travel warnings on the island and 30 had imposed entry restrictions on Taiwan nationals.

Taiwan's Center of Disease Control (CDC) Director Su Ih-jen said the sharp hikes in the toll were mainly due to "the speedy screening of earlier cases."

He insisted the spread of the virus in the south of the island, where the epidemic has worsened within the past week, had been brought "under control" because of increased public awareness and improved medical knowledge.

He added that no new cases had been detected for four days at Chang Gung Memorial Hospital in Kaohsiung County, the worst affected facility in southern Taiwan where 13 people including a doctor had died.

However, SARS-related deaths climbed to 11 at Chung Ho Memorial Hospital in Kaohsiung city, and more suspected cases were reported at Chi Mei Medical Center in the southern city of Tainan.

Some 30 percent of Taiwan's

SARS cases have involved medical workers, and hundreds of hospital staff have quit in protest at working conditions on the frontline of the fight against the killer virus.

In total 94 percent of all SARS infections in Taiwan originated in hospitals.

Meanwhile, investigations are underway into delays by hospital authorities in initially reporting SARS cases.

Executive and prosecution branches also said they were probing alleged cover-ups of cases at hospitals which fueled the outbreak on the island.

The cabinet Wednesday fined four hospitals - Chang Gung, Chung Ho, Taipei Municipal Heping Hospital and Jen Chi Hospital in Taipei - 1.5 million Taiwan dollars (42,860) each for delaying reports on SARS cases.

The Taipei City Government also fined Heping 1.1 million dollars for delaying reports on three SARS cases and imposed fines of 90,000 dollars each on three Heping doctors.

Russia ready to work with US: Putin

AFP, Moscow

Russian President Vladimir Putin said yesterday he would work with his US counterpart George W. Bush on all fronts in a bid to repair relations marred by disagreements over Iraq.

Putin said in a message that international disagreements between the two leaders were outweighed by a common vision on global stability.

-- the clearest statement yet from Moscow that it wanted to leave the Iraqi dispute behind.

The statement was delivered to the White House by visiting Russian Defence Minister Sergei Ivanov and the ITAR-TASS news agency reported from Washington that Bush welcomed Putin's assurances.

The exchange came ahead of a key meeting between Bush and Putin in Saint Petersburg, the Russian leader's native city, on June 1 -- the first face-to-face talks between the two since the Iraq war.

"Russia is prepared to develop cooperation with the United States in all spheres," the statement said.

Putin told Bush "that there are many more things that unite us than questions that bring us apart."

ITAR-TASS news agency said Ivanov -- seen as one of the closest confidants of Putin in Moscow -- held 20-minute talks with Bush that were also attended by US National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice.

"On the whole, Ivanov's US interlocutors assessed the conversation as very positive and warm," ITAR-TASS said in its dispatch from Washington. There was no immediate official reaction from the Bush administration to Putin's message.

The message came ahead of a key UN Security Council vote on Iraq that at one stage threatened to further spoil relations between Moscow and Washington.

After initially balking at the idea, Russia along with its UN Security Council ally France announced Wednesday it would support a US-backed resolution lifting economic sanctions against Iraq.

US officials seemed confident that Moscow was moving back into Washington's camp and would not hold a grudge about the war.



A school official has his temperature checked for prevention from the SARS virus as he enters Beijing's Number 80 High School on Thursday, which re-opened after closing in April due to the outbreak of the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) epidemic. Over 400 students returned to their dormitories late 21 May for classes as they prepare for the college entrance exams in June.

Blast rocks Yale law school, no one injured

REUTERS, New Haven

An explosion rocked an empty classroom at Yale University's law school on Wednesday afternoon and caused some damage but no injuries, officials in New Haven and at the Ivy League school said.

FBI Special Agent Mike Wolf told reporters an "explosive device" had gone off.

The explosion, which knocked out a wall between two rooms, came a day after the US government raised its terror alert status to "high" from "elevated" because of what officials said was a renewed risk of terrorist attack in the United States.

Investigators from the FBI's Joint Terrorism Task Force were headed to Yale, officials in Washington said.

President Bush, who graduated from Yale, spoke earlier on

Wednesday at the Coast Guard Academy in New London, Connecticut, about 50 miles east of New Haven, where Yale is based. The president's daughter Barbara currently attends Yale University as an undergraduate student but was not on campus at the time of the blast.

Yale said in a statement the explosion caused "considerable damage" to the classroom and to an adjacent lounge.

Jennifer Sperling, a first-year law student from Arlington, Virginia, said she was completing a day-long exam when she heard "a really loud boom" from a room on the same floor.

"My heart started pounding, I was hyper-ventilating. Then people started yelling to get out of the building," she said.

Police said there had been no threat before the explosion and no claim of responsibility afterward.

North and South Korea talk, but grudgingly

REUTERS, Seoul

North and South Korea, struggling to iron out profound differences over Pyongyang's atomic arms ambitions, grudgingly began talks yesterday after two days of barbs about Seoul's tougher stance since a US summit.

The South's Yonhap news agency said from Pyongyang the two sides began a round of economic talks at 1 a.m. EDT. Foreign reporters were not allowed to cover the talks, which all but collapsed on Wednesday. The teams did not even dine together.

"The North suggested a meeting," said South Korean spokesman Cho Myoung-gyon, according to a pool report. "We don't know what the North will say in the meeting but the South is maintaining its stance

broadsides.

"If there's no change in North Korea's stance, we can just return," the South's Yonhap news agency quoted a presidential official as saying.

The North showed no sign of backing down. Thursday's edition of the party newspaper Rodong Sinmun said recent South Korean remarks drawing a distinction between North Korea's people and its communist system were an insult.

"It is a reckless act bereft of any elementary morality and national etiquette for the South side to talk about dialogue and contact, reconciliation and cooperation while defaming the system and dignity of its dialogue partner," it said in unusually tough language directed at the South.

The South demanded an apology for the North's remarks because it asked for rice in the same speech and published the

11 fined for spitting amid SARS fears in Singapore

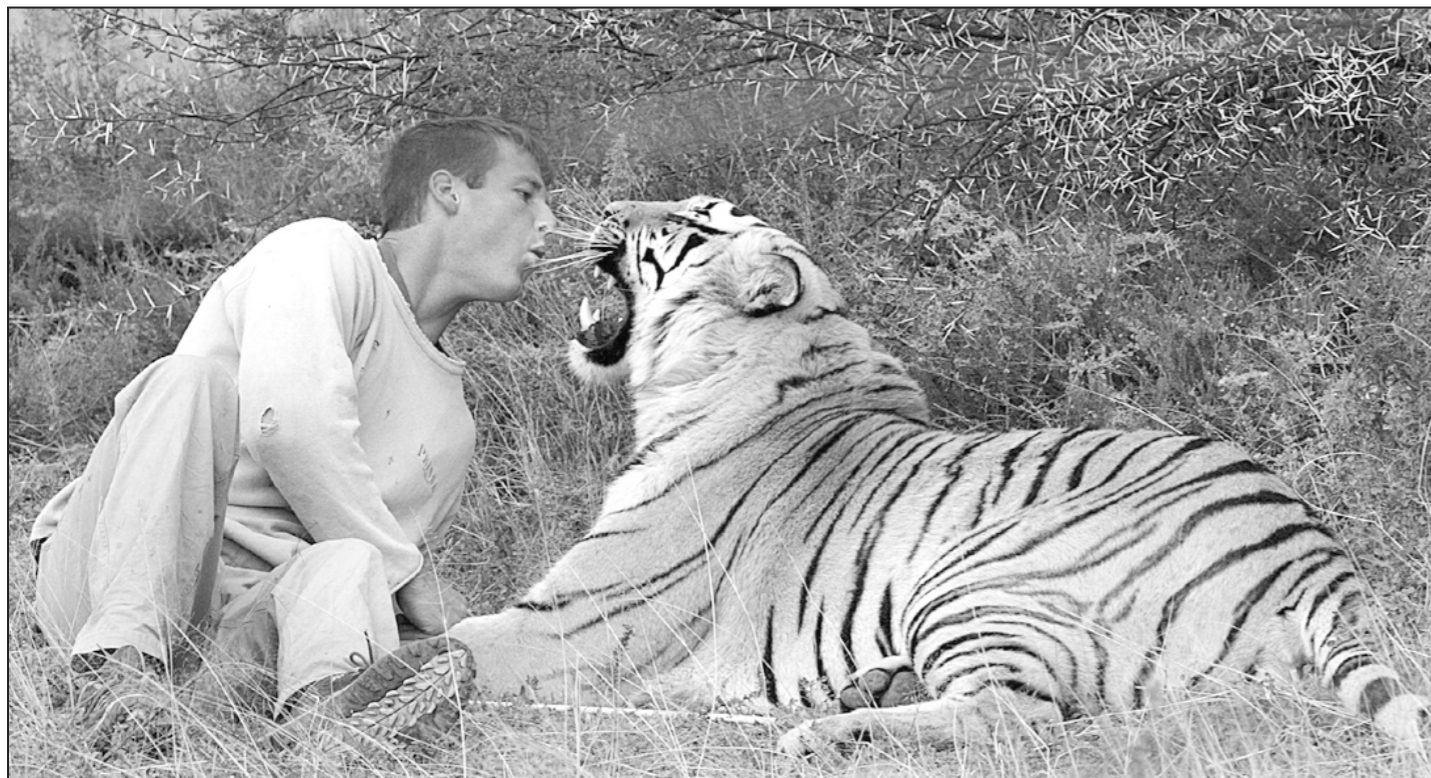
AP, Singapore

A Singapore court fined 11 people for spitting in public as part of a crackdown to help stop the spread of SARS, a newspaper reported yesterday.

The 11 received fines of 300 Singapore dollars (\$260) each while an arrest warrant was issued for another man who failed to show up in court yesterday, the Straits Times reported. They were all caught between May 17 and 18.

The tightly-controlled city-state had already levied fines on people for spitting, but courts rarely required offenders to show up to face charges.

National Environment Agency official Teng Kin Hoong was quoted by The Straits Times as saying his enforcement unit had stepped up checks to prevent "any possible risk of a SARS infection from environmental factors".



Canadian zoologist Dave Salmoni plays with Ron, one of two endangered Bengal tigers being rehabilitated to live in the wild on Tuesday, at Tiger Moon Sanctuary in Philippolis. The rehabilitation program for the captive-bred tigers is a private-funded multi-million dollar project.