



PHOTO: AFP

A US armoured vehicle picks up dust as it drives by an Iraqi woman carrying wood yesterday near the Tuwaita nuclear plant compound outside Baghdad where a team of seven UN International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) scientists is making an inventory of the nuclear material which was under safeguard at the site before the war.

Musharraf can hold two posts: HC

Opposition walks out on budget debate

PTI, AFP, Islamabad

In a major setback to Pakistan's opposition parties agitation questioning the legality of the presidency of Pervez Musharraf, the Lahore High Court has ruled that the military ruler's election though a referendum was valid under law and he was legally entitled to hold the offices of Presidency as well as Chief of Army.

Ruling that the election of Musharraf through a referendum last year was valid, a Division Bench of the Lahore High Court has held that it saw nothing wrong with the general holding the post of chief of army simultaneously.

The opposition has shut down the Parliament for over six months demanding Musharraf to quit as chief of army as a compromise to accept his Presidency and his constitutional amendments with modifications.

"We have not noted anything in the Constitution which would debar the president from remaining in uniform nor is his holding the two office simultaneously creating any hindrance to the smooth functioning

of the government or any other institution," the bench said yesterday while elaborating on its short order issued recently.

The court, in response to a petition filed by Lawyers Forum further ruled that "none of the constitutional provisions is affected if the president remains in the uniform. Therefore, decision by the president that he would take off the uniform on a date of his own choice does not impinge upon any constitutional provision and the Article 6, in no way is attracted to this case."

Meanwhile Pakistan opposition parties walked out of the parliamentary budget debate for a second day running Wednesday, as the conflict between President Pervez Musharraf and hardline Islamists intensified.

Opposition legislators stormed out of the debate after thumping desks and shouting "Go Musharraf Go," in a repeat of Monday's boycott, and held a spontaneous news conference in the national assembly cafeteria to hit out at the army chief-turned-president.

"His uniform has become a

symbol of (public) hatred," Maulana Fazlur Rehman, secretary general of the powerful hardliners' alliance Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA), said.

Rehman accused Musharraf of resorting to "blackmail".

"We will not succumb to blackmailing and will face every challenge and interference in provincial affairs," the MMA leader said.

The MMA-ruled NWFP's assembly voted last week to make sharia the supreme law in provincial courts.

It has banned male doctors from treating women patients and male coaches from training female athletes, forced civil servants to pray five times a day, and is considering establishing a Taliban-style religious police.

It is also considering a bill to force all women to conceal themselves entirely in public with head-to-toe veils.

Naxals blast police station killing three in Andhra Pradesh

PTI, Hyderabad

Three political activists, including a sarpanch, were shot dead and a police station was blasted by PWG Naxalites in separate incidents in Andhra Pradesh during last 24 hours.

Thirty armed Naxals, including 10 women, went to Addanki police station in Prakasham district, and locked up four constables in the adjacent old police station building before blasting the new building with detonators early on Wednesday, police said here. The new building, which houses offices of the inspector and sub-inspector was totally damaged, police said.

The Naxals took away 24 weapons and several rounds of ammunition from the police station and left a note stating the action was in retaliation to a recent encounter in Cuddapah district in which a top Naxal, K M Prasad alias Divakar (a native of Prakasham district), and two others were killed.

The extremists also shot dead Dornala Panchayat Samithi sarpanch R Subbarangiah on Thursday morning when he was coming out of his house, police said, adding he died on the way to hospital.

Iraqis demand inquiry into killing of tribal chief

AFP, Basra

Some 4,000 people marched in Iraq's main southern city of Basra Wednesday demanding that British occupation authorities open an inquiry into last week's assassination of a prominent tribal chief.

"We want an investigation into the murder of Sheikh Ali and the tracking down of his killers," said Sheikh Jamal al-Saadun, a notable from the tribe headed by the slain Sheikh Ali Najm al-Saadun.

Sheikh Ali was shot dead in the centre of Basra on June 4 by four hooded assailants who fled after the

attack.

He headed the influential al-Saadun tribe, which according to residents had close ties with the Baath regime of Saddam Hussein that was ousted by the US-British coalition on April 9.

Tribe members called for revenge as the protesters gathered outside a former presidential palace on the Shatt al-Arab waterway demanding to see an official of the British military command controlling the region.

The demonstrators, who included members of the al-

Montafek and al-Tamimi tribes, raised banners urging a "fair and serious investigation" into the murder and calling for the restoration of security in Iraq's southern capital.

The tribal chief was killed near the Basra office of the Supreme Assembly of the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SAIRI), the main Iraqi Shiite movement.

Members of his tribe said they suspected the group's armed wing, the Badr Brigade, of being behind the murder.

Thousands of Iranians protest near university

REUTERS, Tehran

Thousands of Iranians took to the streets in the early hours of Wednesday, chanting anti-government slogans in largely peaceful protests after police surrounded a Tehran student dormitory, witnesses said.

Uniformed and plain-clothes police officers with batons later moved to break up the protest, but there were no major clashes and witnesses said they saw only a handful of arrests.

But several motorcycles were torched and some shops' windows and a state bank were smashed as demonstrators dispersed.

Residents said a student protest over plans to privatise universities developed into a political demonstration by some 3,000 people who gathered upon hearing that police had surrounded the dormitory. "Political prisoners must be freed," the crowd shouted in a square near Tehran University, the

scene almost four years ago of the biggest pro-reform unrest since the 1979 revolution -- which was also led from the same campus.

Other chants were directed against Iran's clerical rulers. Residents said the chants were the most extreme since the unrest four years ago.

Many people said they had gathered after hearing calls by US-based Iranian exile satellite television channels to go to the campus after the student protests on Tuesday.

"I heard the students had gathered from television," said 46-year-old housewife Parvin.

The head of security at Tehran governor's office said more protests might be expected.

Many in Iran have lost faith in moderate President Mohammad Khatami and his lack of progress in reforming the 24-year-old Islamic Republic in the face of strong conservative opponents in powerful positions within the state.

No US pressure on sending troops to Iraq: Advani

IANS, Washington

Indian Deputy Prime Minister L K Advani said the United States has not exerted any pressure on India to commit its troops to Iraq, instead left New Delhi free to take a decision on the issue after talks with Pentagon experts due in New Delhi next week.

Addressing a press conference at the end of his three-day visit to Washington on Tuesday, Advani said this was the only issue that was raised at every meeting he had with the US officials, including President George W Bush, Vice President Dick Cheney, Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld and National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice.

"The government of India, I believe, on the basis of what I had conveyed to the leaders of the American government, is free to take a decision after hearing from the Pentagon team," he said. The team is reaching New Delhi on Monday.

He said the Bush administration was keen on India's participation in the process of stabilisation in Iraq for "understandable reasons, but I did not see pressure of any kind."

When India's Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) discussed the US request for troop deployment in Iraq, he pointed out, it identified certain issues which needed to be clarified through a "direct dialogue or interaction" with a US team and it was conveyed to Washington at that time. The Bush administration's announcement about dispatching the team was its "natural corollary."



PHOTO: REUTERS

A young girl plays with her umbrella in the first pre-monsoon shower in Mumbai on Wednesday. The main branch of the southwest monsoon arrived in the southern state of Kerala on Sunday, a week behind schedule, bringing down temperatures in Andhra Pradesh also, where more than 1400 people have died in a heat wave.

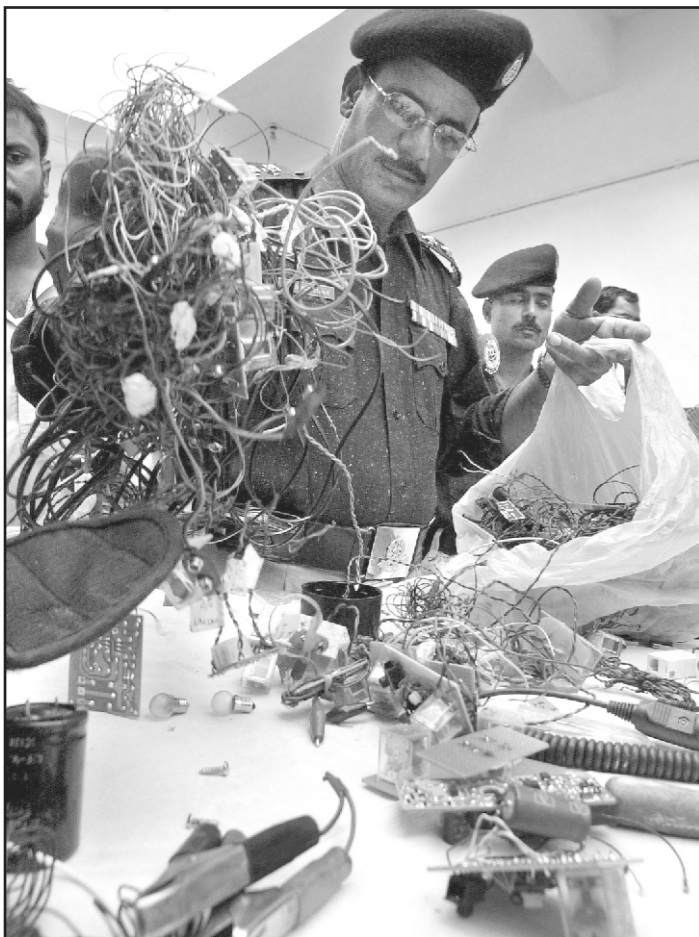


PHOTO: AFP

A Pakistani police official examines electronic gadgets, wires and devices in the port city of Karachi, on Tuesday, which were recovered from a six-men group allegedly involved in an overnight bomb blast. Police arrested six more accused of the bomb blast on the lead of Mohammad Riaz who was the sole injured person of the blast and later arrested on suspicion of carrying the bomb near a Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC) restaurant.

US arrests two more wanted Iraqis

AFP, Baghdad

US-led forces arrested two more senior members of Saddam Hussein's ousted regime but suffered new casualties from a resistance that American officials said will take time to root out.

A US soldier was killed and another critically wounded Tuesday in Baghdad in an attack that came shortly after US officials authorised the spending of 100 million dollars to rebuild the country's battered infrastructure.

While the Americans acknowledge they have no clue as to the fate of Saddam two months after his ouster, the US Central Command announced Wednesday the capture of two more men on the "Top 55" list of wanted Iraqis.

Centcom said coalition troops had arrested Latif Nusayyif al-Jasim al-Dulaymi, a one-time information minister and deputy secretary of the Baath Military Bureau. He was number 18 on the list.

The other Iraqi taken into custody, number 53, was identified as Brigadier General Husayn al-Awadi, described as the former Baath Party chair in the Ninawa region and a brigadier general in the Chemical Corps.

Centcom gave no details on the arrests of the two men, which brought to 30 the number of wanted Iraqi officials captured since the fall of Baghdad on April 9.

Demands to release Suu Kyi intensify

REUTERS, Yangon

Myanmar pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi spent her 12th day in detention on Wednesday as world demands for her immediate release mounted and some countries considered tightening sanctions on the Southeast Asian nation.

Myanmar's military government said on Tuesday her detention was temporary and a UN envoy, allowed to meet Suu Kyi earlier that day, said two of the country's top generals had assured him they would release her "as soon as possible."

Her whereabouts since meeting envoy Razali Ismail are unknown.

Suu Kyi and about two dozen senior members of her National League for Democracy (NLD) have been held at undisclosed locations in the capital since they were taken into custody on May 30, sources in the party say.

Razali was the first outsider to see the Nobel laureate since her detention following clashes between her supporters and members of a pro-military group during a

tour to the north.

Her detention after the May 30 clash, which the United States said it suspected was staged by "government-affiliated thugs," has raised fresh international concern. Several leaders from across the world have condemned the Myanmar junta for detaining Suu Kyi and the United States, Britain and the European Union have threatened more economic sanctions to further isolate the impoverished country.

A drive in the US Congress toward imposing a ban on all imports from Myanmar advanced on Tuesday.

At a White House meeting on Tuesday, President Bush enlisted Thai Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra's help in pressing Myanmar to immediately release Suu Kyi.

Next week Myanmar joins partners in the Association of South East Asian Nations and the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) for meetings in Cambodia, when pressure is almost certain to be applied -- at least quietly.

Imam Samudra denies plotting Bali attack

AFP, Denpasar

Key Bali bomb suspect Imam Samudra, in surprise testimony Wednesday, denied he masterminded the deadly blasts and said fellow suspect Amrozi was the first to suggest they attack the resort island.

But Samudra confirmed that Westerners were the target of the two nightspot blasts that killed 202 people from 21 countries, and expressed no remorse.

"I knew that in the Sari club they are all bules (white people)... from America and their allies," he said, giving evidence in Amrozi's trial.

A relaxed Samudra, who is on trial separately, said that "Bali was (decided) only after Amrozi told us about it."

"I myself was planning to bomb the US embassy or the US consul-

ate and did not think about Bali at all," he said.

Samudra also denied he was involved in field operations. "I left the matter to Amrozi because he knows Indonesia better... he is my senior," he added.

Amrozi disputed Samudra's testimony, which differs markedly from past accounts of the conspiracy.

"On the matter of being the one suggesting the idea, that is too high for me. That was not me, I did not even graduate from school," Amrozi said after Samudra had finished testifying.

A defence lawyer has quoted Samudra as saying he was the sole mastermind of last October's blasts.

Prosecutors say Samudra, 33, masterminded the bombings, picked the targets and assigned Amrozi to buy one tonne of bomb-

making chemicals and a van to carry a bomb.

"We have an underground nature, so there is no hierarchy. Everyone automatically knows what they have to do," Samudra said of his fellow bombers, referring to them only as mujahideen (holy warriors) and making no mention of JI.

He also withdrew some statements he had made to police and denied that he and other suspects including Amrozi had met to prepare the bombing plans.

Samudra said he did not expect the bombs, which killed 38 Indonesians, to kill anyone but Americans and their allies.

Questioned by judges, Samudra said he "never gave an order or duties to anyone" but added: "In a moral way I had responsibility."