



PHOTO: AFP

Iraqis visit the grave of Ayatollah Mohammad Baqer al-Hakim in the city of Najaf, south of Baghdad, yesterday. Hakim, blown to bits 29 August in a double car bombing in Najaf along with at least 82 others, was opposed to the presence of foreign troops in his country. Najaf, some 180 kilometres (110 miles) south of Baghdad, was roped off by legions of Iraqi security guards on the look-out for new attacks.

250 Iraqi officers to become cops

AFP, Baghdad

Some 250 more policemen graduated Thursday from a crash course aimed at transforming a once corrupt and brutal force into a key element of the US-led coalition's efforts to fight crime and terrorism in post-Saddam Iraq.

"Remember that every day when you put on your uniform the citizens of Baghdad will look to you to do the right thing," US Army Brigadier General Curtis Scaparrotti told them.

He was speaking at a ceremony held in the capital's police academy, just a few hundred metres (yards) from the spot where a car bomb on Monday ripped through a police parking lot and killed an officer.

Scaparrotti and the Baghdad

police chief, Hassan al-Obeidi, shook the graduates' hands and handed them their Transition Integration Program diplomas as they filed past, to the rhythms of bagpipes and drums played by a police band.

US army helicopters hovered overhead, and heavily armed troops watched from the rooftops above the courtyard ceremony to provide protection for the senior army officers present.

The three-week course, the third so far in Baghdad, aimed to enable the Iraqi officers to "deliver law enforcement service to the citizens of Baghdad in a more humane and dignified way," according to an army statement.

It was provided by a US military

police unit normally based in San Diego, California, and was due to be supplemented by further training later in the year.

"I learned a lot," said proud graduate Sergeant Salah Al-Ridha. "We learned about human rights and respect between the policeman and the citizen. None of that existed before."

Ridha, like most of the graduates Thursday, was a member of the police during Saddam Hussein's lengthy reign.

The course he attended was part of the US-led coalition's push to reform of the once-dreaded Iraqi police force and have it take over many security and policing matters from the military.

Major bombing campaign foiled in Iraq

AFP, Kirkuk

Kurdish security forces have found 1.2 tonnes of explosives in three rubbish skips, one of which had been placed on a key bridge in the northern oil capital of Kirkuk, a senior investigator said yesterday.

The discovery followed the arrest Wednesday of three suspected members of Ansar al-Islam, a militant group linked by Washington to al-Qaeda, carrying suitcases packed with explosives in the city.

"The three confessed to packing three rubbish skips with 1,200 kg of explosives surrounded by metal fragments," the investigator told AFP.

"The first was intended to destroy the Third Bridge of Kirkuk. The other two, which were found mounted on lorries, were intended for a bombing in a Kirkuk public square and an assassination attempt against Patriotic Union of Kurdistan leader Jalal Talabani in Suleimaniya," his northern base.

Hunt for Laden moving closer, says Pakistan

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistan on Wednesday said that hunt for terror mastermind Osama bin Laden was moving closer towards its target following leads provided by captured Al-Qaeda operatives.

"Arrests of some key Al-Qaeda activists in the recent past provided some vital leads that has helped dismantle the Al-Qaeda network," Interior Minister Faisal Saleh Hayat said.

"As a result slowly and gradually, the noose is tightening around Osama and his aides," state-run Associated Press of Pakistan quoted Hayat as telling reporters in Islamabad.

"Time, space and options are becoming limited by the day for Osama and all those linked to him." "Nobody can say exactly whether Osama is in Pakistan or at some other specific place in the world," Hayat said.

"Those who say that he is in Pakistan, should come out with a solid proof for that and we will take action," he added.

Hostage drama ends in West Bengal

PTI, Siuri

An armed man who took 60 patients hostage at a hospital here in Birbhum district of West Bengal on Wednesday night, surrendered before the Inspector General of Police on Thursday morning, the police said.

The 30-year-old unidentified man strapped with explosives held hostage 60 patients around 8.15 pm on Wednesday.

One patient was shot in the leg. The district top brass was in constant touch with the chief secretary and home secretary. The chief minister has been informed as well.

Though the motive of the hostage drama was yet to be ascertained, police suspect it was a fallout of rivalry among the coal mafia. Two of the patients admitted at the ward, had been shot at in nearby Panchra on Monday.

The unidentified man clad in gray-coloured shirt, trousers and a yellow cap, stormed into the hospital along with four accomplices around 8.15 pm on Wednesday. After throwing country-made bombs and shooting blank rounds, the five entered the male paying ward.

Musharraf calls for Pak nuke upgrades

President Bush to meet Pakistani PM Jamali in October

ANI, Islamabad

Qualitative upgrades in Pakistan's nuclear programme would strengthen national security, Pakistan's President Pervez Musharraf has said.

Dismissing any thoughts of freezing or rolling back of the country's nuclear programme, Musharraf said such considerations were "irrelevant, outdated and totally false."

Chairing a meeting of the National Command Authority (NCA), he reiterated Pakistan's resolve not to enter into an arms race with anyone while ensuring consolidation of the country's minimum deterrence needs, The News reported on Thursday.

The NCA meeting reviewed the progress of Pakistan's strategic programme and expressed complete satisfaction over the operational readiness of the strategic forces and the ongoing pace of development work.

Participants at the meeting also gave their approval to a

number of recommendations put forward by the NCA secretariat and the Strategic Plans Division. Prime Minister Mir Zafarullah Khan Jamali, Foreign Minister Khurshid Mahmud Kasuri, the three service chiefs and other senior military and civil officials attended the meeting.

Musharraf also warned that there was an inspired and malicious campaign being carried out by a section of the international media in connection to Pakistan's alleged assistance to Iran's nuclear programme.

About the non-proliferation policy, he described it as having matured over the years, and that it would continue to be a top national priority.

Meanwhile, Pakistan has been invited along with 35 other countries to attend a Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) conference in Moscow from September 18-20. Experts from Iran, Russia, United States, North Korea, China, Britain, Germany, France, Pakistan and India are also expected to

attend the moot.

PTI from Washington reports US President George W Bush will meet Prime Minister Mir Zafarullah Khan Jamali of Pakistan at the White House on October 1 for talks on key bilateral, regional and international issues, official sources said.

The leaders will also discuss "the close cooperation between the United States and Pakistan in the war against terrorism," White House press secretary Scott McClellan said in a statement on Wednesday.

Meanwhile Reuters from Jammu reported that two militants and a woman were killed and three children wounded, when guerrillas tried to raid an Indian army camp in Kashmir on Thursday, a defence official said.

The attack is the latest in a rising wave of violence across J&K, which threatens a tentative peace bid between nuclear-armed India and Pakistan.

The pre-dawn attack took place in Kounser in Poonch district, the state's winter capital,

the official said. It is 250 km north of Jammu.

The guerrillas were shot dead by soldiers outside the gates of the army camp. Whereas the woman and her children were caught in the cross fire, he said.

Meanwhile PTI from reported that a Lashkar-e-Taiba militant was arrested from a South West locality here on Wednesday night, police said on Thursday.

On a tip off, Special Cell of the Delhi Police arrested Abdul Karim, wanted in connection with some cases in Poonch district of Jammu and Kashmir, from Mahipalpur area, they said.

Karim, a resident of Mendhar in Poonch, was suspected to be trying to set up a base for the outfit in the Capital, the sources said.

He was staying in a rented house and had introduced himself as a student.

LTTE asks India not to give military aid to Lanka

PTI, Colombo

The LTTE has asked India not to give military assistance to Sri Lanka at a juncture when the peace process is on.

This request was made by Colonel Karuna, who is a Special Military Commander of the LTTE, and is a member of the LTTE's delegation for talks with the Sri Lankan government, in an interview to the Tamil daily Thinakural in Zurich on Wednesday.

Karuna said that while it was normal for one country to provide military assistance to another country, India should avoid giving such aid to Sri Lanka at this juncture when a peace process was on and India itself was supporting the process. "In this matter India should be cautious," he said.

"Military assistance should not be extended to other situations," Karuna said. Apparently, he meant that India should stop giving such aid if war were to break out. "It will lead to a grave situation," he warned. He appealed to the Sri Lankan government to be mindful of this.

Karuna was responding to reports on Tuesday that a 12 member Indian delegation, comprising officers from the Army, Navy and the Air Force, was on a five day visit to Sri Lanka's military establishments to study ways and means of enhancing the training of Sri Lankan personnel.

The island daily had quoted Sri Lankan military sources to say that

the visit was "very significant", but Indian official sources said that it was routine, had been fixed long ago, and formed part of a long standing training programme.

Sugarcoating the warning to India, Karuna said that Indians were cautious and would not precipitate a crisis. He did not expect India to sow seeds of confusion over the question of a LTTE-dominated Interim Administration for the North East Province. He noted that India, like other countries, was supporting the Tamils' stand that the North and East should not be separated.

Meanwhile AFP from Colombo said that rebel Tamil Tigers threw down the gauntlet yesterday saying Sri Lanka's faltering peace process would collapse unless the government gave in to their demands for political power.

The stark warning by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) came as Colombo indicated it was banking on foreign diplomacy with help from Norwegian and Japanese peace brokers to salvage the peace bid.

The LTTE said it would submit its own proposals for establishing an interim administration in the island's embattled areas in response to a government offer made in July.

The group's constitutional experts met in Paris last month to formulate a counter proposal and are expected to finalise their position before the end of the month, the Tigers said.

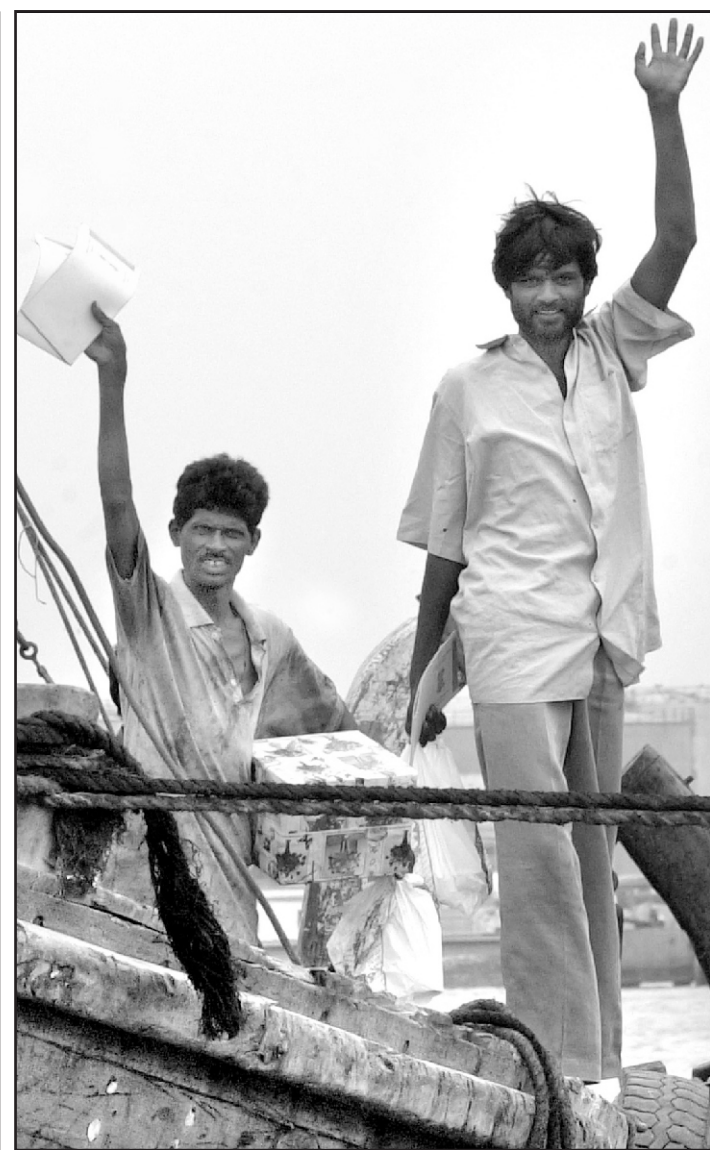


PHOTO: AFP

Indian fishermen wave as they depart from Karachi yesterday following their release by the Pakistani authorities. Pakistan's government released 269 Indian fishermen along with their 31 boats arrested for entering the Pakistani sea limits.



PHOTO: AFP

Catholic schoolgirls are in tears as one of them (R) is forced to leave her already boarded-up home during the evacuation of Catholic families from the Deerpark Road near Ardoyne, Northern Ireland after a large group of loyalists armed with petrol bombs threatened the families in the leafy residential road and ordered them out Wednesday evening.

Junta says Suu Kyi "physically well"

Suu Kyi not on hunger strike: Thailand

AFP, Yangon

Myanmar's military government said yesterday that its opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi was "physically well" and charged that US claims that she was on a hunger strike were the result of "spin doctors".

The junta's statement, originally made from the Myanmar embassy in London and reissued from Yangon, was the latest of several fierce denials since Washington made its shock announcement Sunday that the Nobel peace laureate was refusing food.

"The sudden but well-concerted appearance of a manufactured piece of news relating to Aung San Suu Kyi's hunger strike is another glaring example of spin doctors at work once again," the statement said.

"The Myanmar Ministry of Foreign Affairs has already expressed this suspicion in its statement dismissing the US assertion which may, in fact, have been completely fabricated for political purposes," it said.

"The truth of the matter being that the lady in question is physically well and living in the conditions that the International

Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) described a month ago as "highly satisfactory".

Representatives from the ICRC met with Suu Kyi on July 28 and are the last independent observers to have verified her health.

Despite the junta's denials, Washington has repeated its assertions and said Wednesday they were not made "on the basis of flimsy information."

Analysts have expressed scepticism that the pro-democracy icon has gone on the hunger strike and have said it may be a US tactic to increase international pressure on the junta.

The US announcement came a day after Myanmar's new prime minister General Khin Nyunt delivered his seven-point plan for the country's shift towards democracy.

Thailand, which has expressed support for the plan, said Thursday that on the basis of its intelligence reports it did not believe Aung San Suu Kyi was on the strike.

The leader was detained after violence between her supporters and a junta-backed mob as she made a political tour of the country's north.



PHOTO: AFP

Activists of pro-democracy groups of Myanmar shout slogans during a demonstration in New Delhi yesterday asking for the release of Myanmar opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi. The US State Department recently claimed that Aung San Suu Kyi had begun fasting to protest against her three-month detention at the hands of the country's military rulers.