

British police thwart plot to kill Putin

AFP, London

British police have thwarted a plot to kill Russian President Vladimir Putin after arresting a renegade Russian intelligence agent in London, The Sunday Times reported.

"This is a criminal investigation into something that has an international dimension," a senior British government official was quoted as saying by the weekly newspaper.

"It's a matter for (Scotland) Yard who are taking it seriously," the unnamed source reportedly said.

According to The Sunday Times, detectives from Scotland Yard's anti-terrorist branch arrested a former KGB major, said to be a trained hitman, and a second Russian after a tip-off last weekend.

The would-be assassins were reportedly held for five days at a police station in west London under Britain's anti-terrorist legislation and questioned about possible links to Chechen guerrillas.

Senior JI figure captured in Philippines

REUTERS, Manila

The Philippines said yesterday it has captured one of the top operatives of Southeast Asian militant Islamic group Jemaah Islamiyah.

Defense Secretary Eduardo Ermita said Taufik Rifqi was arrested on October 2 in a hotel in Cotabato city on the southern island of Mindanao, where the military is battling a host of Muslim rebel groups fighting for an Islamic state.

"It seems he is no. 3 in Southeast Asia," Ermita said of Rafiqi's rank in Jemaah Islamiyah, which has been blamed for last year's bombings on the Indonesian resort island of Bali and accused of links with Osama bin Laden's al-Qaeda network.

Security officials announced the arrest of Taufik hours before President Bush arrived in Manila on Saturday for talks with Philippine President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo on boosting cooperation in their war on terror.



PHOTO: REUTERS

Iraqis from the restive town of Falluja celebrate as a US Army ammunition truck blazes yesterday. Witnesses said the vehicle had been hit with a rocket propelled grenade in an ambush and there was no information on casualties.

Palestinians plan new truce talks in US

Israel deploys thousands of reservists to WB, Gaza

REUTERS, AFP, Ramallah

Three senior officials of President Yasser Arafat's Fatah movement plan to visit Washington for talks about achieving a truce with Israel in the occupied territories, they told Reuters Saturday.

Legislator Hatem Abdel-Qader said he and his colleagues had been invited by Democratic members of Congress for what would be their first US visit since the start of a three-year uprising for statehood in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

The officials were scheduled to leave early on Sunday to hold talks

over three days to explore the possibility of obtaining US guarantees behind a potential cease-fire deal to calm the violence raging in the Palestinian territories.

"The aim of this visit is to try to get US guarantees to reach a mutual truce," such as a commitment to post international monitors to enforce a cease-fire, Abdel-Qader said.

The planned talks are touted to be the most prominent by Palestinians held in Washington since former Palestinian Prime Minister Mahmoud Abbas met President Bush in July.

Abdel-Qader said the delegation

also has meetings planned with American Jewish leaders, David Satterfield, deputy assistant secretary of state for Near East Affairs and Dennis Ross, a former Middle East envoy who heads a think-tank called the Washington Institute for Near East Policy.

Abdel-Qader is to be accompanied by lawmaker Qaddoura Fares and Ahmed Ghneim, a senior Fatah official. Arafat, who is shunned by Washington, has no knowledge of the visit but "would welcome any such meeting," a senior aide, Ahmed Abdel-Rahman, said.

AFP adds: The Israeli army is

deploying thousands of reservists to the West Bank and Gaza Strip after intelligence reports that Palestinian militants were planning more attacks, reports and military sources said.

The Israeli media reported that five reserve battalions -- which are each composed of at least 500 troops -- had been called up on the orders of Defence Minister Shaul Mofaz, despite the misgivings of chief of staff General Moshe Yaalon.

According to army radio reports Sunday, the five battalions will be mobilised for three weeks in order to replace regular army units who are due to undergo training.

Pope beatifies Mother Teresa before huge crowd

REUTERS, Vatican City

Speaking before a vast crowd, Pope John Paul beatified Mother Teresa of Kolkata yesterday, putting the "Saint of the Gutters" on the fast track to sainthood for her life of selfless help to the poor.

"With our apostolic authority, we grant that the venerable servant of God Teresa of Kolkata shall from now on be called blessed," declared the pontiff, a longtime friend of the nun who died in 1997 at the age of 87.

Applause and cheering broke out in the crowd of more than 150,000 and a large tapestry showing a smiling Mother Teresa was unveiled

from a balcony of Christendom's largest church.

The crowd, made up of Catholics and non-Catholic admirers, packed St Peter's Square and filled the broad Via della Conciliazione leading from the Vatican to the River Tiber.

The ethnic Albanian sister, winner of the 1979 Nobel Peace Prize, tended the sick and dying of Kolkata's slums for decades with the Missionaries of Charity order she founded.

Many of her nuns in their blue-trimmed white saris stood out in the vast crowd, where a special section for thousands of Rome's homeless and downtrodden was reserved

close to the elevated altar where the pope said the beatification Mass.

"Mother Teresa was for us great because she was not just a daughter of our homeland, Albania. She gave up our flag and every other flag for one flag, the flag of love," said Dod Brokshi, an Albanian who came with his family.

"Coming here means a new renaissance for us," he said, waving the red Albanian flag emblazoned with a black eagle.

While she never hid her Christian inspiration, the nun won admiration from Hindus, Muslims and other non-Catholics around the world.

"It is not enough for us to say: I love God, but I do not love my neigh-

bor... How can you love God whom you do not see, if you do not love your neighbor whom you see, whom you touch, with whom you live?" she said in her 1979 Nobel Peace Prize acceptance speech.

A frail figure, she became the world's most famous nun for decades of work among the sick and dying, the homeless and the lepers in the Indian city of Calcutta, one of the most impoverished on earth.

She launched her Missionaries of Charity order in 1950 with only 12 nuns. It has grown to 4,500 sisters in 133 countries running homes, schools and hospices for the poor and dying.



PHOTO: REUTERS

Pope John Paul II greets a nun of the Missionaries of Charity during the beatification ceremony of Mother Teresa in Saint Peter's Square yesterday. Pilgrims, tourists, Catholics and members of other religions streamed into the Vatican on Sunday to see Pope John Paul II put Mother Teresa of Kolkata on the road to sainthood.



PHOTO: AFP

Indian devotees of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP, World Hindu Council) wave their trishuls (tridents) in the air as they shout slogans during the Sankalp Sammelan (Oath taking meeting) in Ayodhya on Saturday.

VHP leaders vow to oust 'secular forces'

PTI, Ayodhya

With their plans for a congregation in the Ram temple campaign foiled here, top VHP leaders on Saturday fired on all cylinders against all "secular forces" and vowed to oust them from power to make India a "Hindu" nation.

While VHP leaders Ashok Singhal and Praveen Togadia attacked the Mulayam Singh Yadav Government accusing it of "repression" on the "Ram Bhakts" and foiling their on Friday's "sankalp Sabha" (assembly for taking pledge), Singhal warned Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee to mend his "secular" ways.

Describing secularism as the "biggest enemy" of the nation, Singhal said "Atalji, if you don't come to us, we will abandon you," in an apparent reference to the NDA agenda that commits itself to secular governance.

The leaders were addressing the VHP cadres that had gathered in the temple town for the massive congregation it had planned on Friday and were arrested.

Togadia, who was earlier in the day detained in Lucknow on apprehension of breach of peace in

Ayodhya, was later allowed to go to the temple town repeatedly on an undertaking from the VHP that he would not indulge in any action that would vitiate atmosphere there.

Singhal invited the youth to be prepared to make "any sacrifice" for "wiping out" secular ideology and make the Bajrang Dal and Durga Vahini strong over a period of three years. They will be paid an honorarium.

"To make the country a Hindu Rashtra is our ultimate objective," he said adding that the interests of the Hindus could be protected only then.

Singhal said the VHP would identify "Ram bhakts" who were injured in Friday's police "action" and those who had to go without food for days together and walk on foot for several kilometres to reach here.

Stating that the difficulties encountered by the 'Ram bhakts' had only strengthened their resolve, Singhal said it had become clear that no force on the earth could stop Ram temple construction.

Roh, Bush to talk nukes, troop dispatch today

THE KOREA HERALD/ ANN, Bangkok

South Korea and the United States will discuss North Korea's nuclear threat and Seoul's decision to send troops to Iraq when they meet here today, Seoul officials said.

President Roh Moo-hyun will hold bilateral summit talks with US President George W. Bush on the sidelines of the annual gathering of Asian and Pacific leaders that opened yesterday.

Other topics likely to be discussed at the summit are the controversial relocation of 37,000 US troops stationed in the South and the 50-year alliance between the two countries.

In particular, the two leaders may discuss whether the troops South Korea plans to dispatch to Iraq should include combatants and how many soldiers the United States wants Seoul to send.

Just two days before the summit talks, the Roh government decided to dispatch troops to Iraq despite mounting opposition in the country.

But Seoul has yet to determine whether to send combat troops or noncombatants, such as engineering or medical forces. The United States has requested South Korea send a light infantry division.

New Bolivian leader calls for end to violence

REUTERS, El Alto, Bolivia

Bolivia's new president ventured into the slum city at the heart of the country's popular revolt on Saturday, appealing for calm one day after his predecessor quit in the face of protests that claimed more than 70 lives.

President Carlos Mesa, elevated from vice-president after President Gonzalo Sanchez de Lozada stepped down on Friday, received a rousing welcome in El Alto, a ramshackle community of about 700,000 people overlooking La Paz.

"Never again should we lose a life through battles with the government," Mesa, addressing his first public rally since taking office, told a cheering crowd of about 1,000 people. The throng included old women in traditional bowler hats and young men waving the multicolored Inca flag.

Under the constitution Mesa can serve until 2007 but he has asked congress to call early elections. He says his "gigantic task" is leading an interim government that prevents South America's poorest nation "sinking to the bottom."

Laden vows more suicide attacks in new tape

REUTERS, Dubai

Al Jazeera broadcast two audio tapes purportedly from Osama bin Laden on Saturday vowing more suicide attacks inside and outside the United States and warning that all countries backing Washington over Iraq were targets.

The speaker on the tapes urged Iraqis to wage a holy war against American "crusaders" in Iraq until an Islamic government was set up in Baghdad.

"You should know that this war (by the US-led occupiers in Iraq) is a new crusade against the Islamic world and is a fateful war for the whole (Muslim) nation," the speaker said.

"We, God willing, will continue to fight you (Washington) and will continue martyrdom (suicide) operations inside and outside the United States until you abandon your oppression and foolish acts."

The speaker said it was now clear President Bush had launched the war that ousted Saddam Hussein to fulfil a "Zionist" lobby aim of destroying Iraq's military might and seizing its oil wealth.

"Let the unjust know we have the right to respond at any suitable time and place to all who participate in

this cruel war -- Britain, Spain, Australia, Poland, Japan, Italy and Muslim states, and especially Kuwait and other Gulf states."

It was not immediately possible to independently verify the authenticity of the tapes, but the voice and style of speech were similar to bin Laden's.

White House spokesman Scott McClellan said: "(The tapes are) a reminder that the global war on terror continues. Terrorists are enemies of the civilised world... That's why we are taking the fight to the killers and bringing them to justice."

McClellan, accompanying Bush at an Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit in Bangkok, said US authorities would analyse the tapes.

The recordings -- one addressed to Americans and the other to Iraqis -- appeared to be recent because the speaker accused former Palestinian Prime Minister Mahmoud Abbas, who resigned from his post only last month, of being a US agent.

The tapes seemed likely to bolster Bush's planned message to the APEC summit.

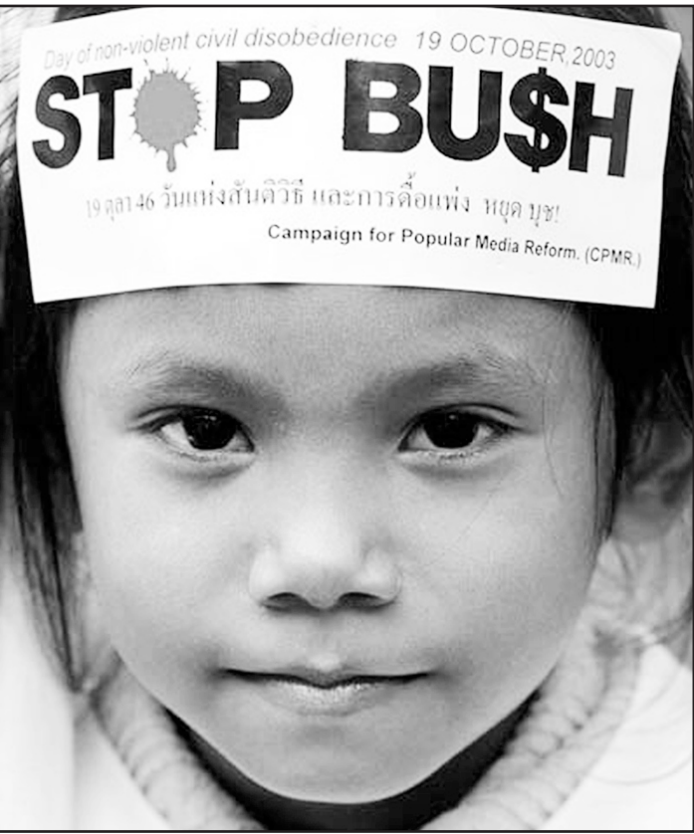


PHOTO: AFP

Thai girl wears a sticker saying "Stop Bush" during an anti-APEC demonstration at Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok yesterday. Some 400 protesters staged the demonstration in the central Bangkok as leaders from the 21-member Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) grouping gather for a summit.

Bush rules out non-aggression pact with North Korea

REUTERS, Bangkok

President Bush yesterday ruled out a non-aggression treaty with North Korea as demanded by Pyongyang but left the door open to providing security assurances in another form.

"If we think there's an opportunity to move the process forward we will discuss it with our partners. We will not have a treaty, if that's what you're asking. That's off the table," Bush told reporters as he met Thai Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra.

Bush repeated that the United States had no plans to invade North Korea. "I've said as plainly as I can

that we have no intention of invading North Korea," he said.

He said the United States was exploring all options with the other parties involved in negotiations with North Korea -- China, Russia, Japan and South Korea.

North Korea has long demanded a non-aggression pact with the United States as part of its negotiations over a nuclear weapons program that the CIA believes has produced at least one or two nuclear weapons.

Bush planned to discuss the options later on Sunday in a meeting with Chinese President Hu Jintao on

the fringes of an Asia-Pacific summit in Bangkok.

"First of all what's important here is that the burden is on North Korea, not on America. North Korea must get rid of her nuclear ambitions. She must get rid of her weapons programs, in a verifiable way. I might add," Bush said.

Secretary of State Colin Powell said on Friday the United States had drafted new ideas on security assurances to offer to North Korea in exchange for a promise to dismantle nuclear weapon programs. He said the effort was in the early stages.

Two militants, army officer killed in Kashmir

PTI, Srinagar

Two militants and an Army officer were killed in a gunbattle in the frontier district of Kupwara in Jammu and Kashmir early yesterday, defence sources said in Srinagar.

The encounter broke out at KK Gali, 10 km north-west of Kupwara, in the wee hours when terrorists opened fire on an Army patrol, they said.

Two terrorists, yet to be identified, and a lieutenant were killed in the encounter, the sources added.

Taliban beat people for shaving their beards

REUTERS, Khost

A group of Taliban guerrillas briefly captured a highway in southeastern Afghanistan and punished some passengers for shaving their beards and listening to music, witnesses said on Saturday.

The incident was the latest sign of growing activities of the remnants of the Taliban regime since it was thrown out of power in a U.S.-led offensive in late 2001.

Witnesses said some 30 Taliban members also hoisted the radical militia's white flag on the road linking Khost and Paktia provinces at Kargha area and set up checkpoints for about three hours on Friday afternoon.