

Blast kills 100th British soldier in Iraq

REUTERS, London

A British soldier was killed by an explosion in southern Iraq on Tuesday, becoming the 100th British service member to die in the campaign since the US-led invasion in 2003.

The Ministry of Defense said three other soldiers were hurt, one seriously, in the blast, which took place on Tuesday morning in the southern port of Umm Qasr in Basra province.

It gave no further details of the incident, nor of the identities of the soldiers, who were from the 7th Armoured Brigade, the main British force in Iraq.

"I can confirm that a British soldier died from injuries sustained as a result of an explosion at approximately 8:34 local time in Basra province," a ministry spokesman said.

The three injured soldiers were being treated at Britain's Shaiba base nearby.

The spokesman confirmed that the death was the 100th in the Iraq operation.

"Every death in Iraq is as tragic, whether it's the 100th or the 99th or the first. They are all equally tragic," he said. Of those who died during the operation, 77 are listed as having been killed in action and the rest through accident or illness.

Opposition plans protests to mark Nepal king's takeover

AFP, Kathmandu

Nepal opposition groups said they would mark the first anniversary Wednesday of King Gyanendra's seizure of power with protests and a mass rally, as police reported 20 women detained for staging a demonstration.

"The seven opposition parties will be holding rallies in different parts of the Kathmandu valley and converge for a mass meeting at 2pm in Bantapur (in the city centre)," Shovakar Parjuli, secretary of the Nepali Congress party, told AFP.

The parties were sidelined when King Gyanendra sacked the government on February 1 last year, claiming it was corrupt, had failed to hold elections and had not managed to defeat a decade-long Maoist insurgency which has killed more than 12,000 people.

After taking over, Gyanendra jailed politicians, declared a state of emergency and cut off telecommunications.

Political parties and student groups have since then staged periodic protests, including rallies 10 days ago which sparked running battles between police and activists in Durbar Square, the historic old heart of Kathmandu.



British Prime Minister Tony Blair (R) shakes the hand of Afghanistan's President Hamid Karzai (L) during the opening speeches at a conference on Afghanistan in London yesterday. Karzai told the war-torn country's international partners Tuesday that any weakness in fighting terrorism within Afghanistan would lead to bloodshed across the world. He told a conference of donors to his fledgling democracy that they had to stand firm in the fight against narcotics cultivation and back his strategy for bringing Afghanistan off its knees.

World has stake in helping Afghanistan

Says Kofi Annan

AFP, London

The entire international community has a major stake in helping Afghanistan meet the "serious challenges ahead," UN Secretary General Kofi Annan warned at a conference of world leaders in London Tuesday.

Speaking before countries signed a new compact with President Hamid Karzai's government, Annan said continued international involvement was necessary to build on developments since the extremist Taliban was ousted in 2001.

"This is a time for committed action," he explained. "After being forced to sacrifice so much in war, the Afghan people have willingly given even more to peace. They expect a peace dividend. And they deserve it."

Annan, flanked by British Prime

Minister Tony Blair, Karzai and UN Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, praised Afghanistan's transition from "a nation held hostage by terror and by terrorists" into a "nascent democracy".

But he warned that the creation of a democratic constitution, representative national parliament and legitimately-elected government should not blind people to the "serious challenges ahead".

Chief among them were the fight against a resurgent Taliban, particularly in the south, extremist violence and the illegal narcotics industry, all of which threatened the gains made in the last five years, he added.

"Afghanistan's progress is also a global concern. It is in the interest of the entire international community to provide assistance as the country consolidates its moves towards peace, democracy and, above all, security, which under-

pins advancement on every other front," he said.

"The partnership (between the UN and Afghan factions) which emerged in Bonn (in 2001), and which we renew today, must continue to support the Afghan people... as they work to realise their vision of a vibrant Afghan state."

Annan said the new "compact" -- which will provide international military and economic support in exchange for Kabul promoting stability and development -- commits other countries to "sustained and prolonged engagement" in Afghanistan.

Security concerns were at the head of the list of priorities, he stated.

Forces from the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) are deploying extra troops to Afghanistan as part of the reconstruction and security effort.

Second US soldier found guilty of Afghan assault

REUTERS, Kabul

A US military court found a second soldier guilty of mistreating detainees in

Afghanistan in July and sentenced him to six months in detention, the US military said.

Sergeant Kevin D. Myricks was found guilty of conspiracy to maltreat a detainee and maltreatment of two detainees at a hearing at a US base in Afghanistan on Monday.

The court martial and subsequent punishment of the soldier reflected the seriousness with which the military viewed the incident, said Major General Jason Kamiya, commander of US-led forces fighting insurgents in Afghanistan.

Myricks, demoted to the rank of private, was being held at the main US base at Bagram, north of Kabul, pending transfer to Kuwait for detention, the US military said in a statement.

US will not give in to Carroll's kidnappers

REUTERS, Baghdad

The United States will not give in to the demands of the kidnappers of reporter Jill Carroll, a US military spokesman said Tuesday, after a new video was aired in which she called for Iraqi women prisoners to be freed.

The American journalist kidnapped in Iraq appeared veiled and weeping in the video broadcast by Arabic satellite channel Al Jazeera on Monday night. Her voice could not be heard on the tape but Al Jazeera said she called for US forces and the Iraqi Interior Ministry to release all women in their custody.

It was the first glimpse of Carroll since her kidnappers released a video on January 17 in which they threatened to kill her within 72 hours if women prisoners were not released. The deadline had passed with no word on her fate.

"We will not make concessions to terrorist demands," US military spokesman in Iraq Lieutenant Colonel Barry Johnson told Reuters. The United States says it does not negotiate with kidnappers or terrorists.

He said US forces were continuing to work with Iraqi authorities "to resolve the situation as quickly as possible." US and Iraqi soldiers have staged several raids on homes and a mosque in their hunt for her.

The US military released five women prisoners last week, but both they and Iraqi officials insisted the move had been pre-planned and was not linked to the hostage-takers' demands.

US forces say they continue to hold at least four more women security detainees. The Iraqi government has been pressing for the release of the women; the detention of women offends Iraqis and the U.S. military seeks to avoid it in most cases.

"The American journalist kidnapped in Iraq urged her family and Americans around the world to demand that U.S. military forces and the Iraqi interior (ministry) release all Iraqi women prisoners," Jazeera said on Monday.

"She said that this would help in her release," the station said, without giving further details.

The Interior Ministry holds up to 2,000 suspects, the United Nations says, and was the focus of controversy when US troops found dozens of abused Sunni men in a secret jail last year.

An Iraqi Justice Ministry official said there were a number of women among about 7,000 people being held in civilian jails under its control, although he did not have an exact figure.

Carroll, 28, a freelance journalist working for the Christian Science Monitor, was abducted in Baghdad on January 7 by gunmen who also killed her Iraqi interpreter on the spot.

There has been a spate of kidnappings of foreigners in Iraq over the past few months after a lull during most of 2005. Four Christian peace activists -- a Briton, an American and two Canadians -- are still being held captive, as are two Kenyan engineers and a Jordanian embassy driver.

Russia's entry into WTO blocked by US

AFP, Moscow

The United States is "holding out" on agreeing to support Russia's membership in the World Trade Organisation even though virtually every other country supports it, President Vladimir Putin said Tuesday at a news conference in Moscow.

"All our partners support us," Putin said. "Only the US is holding out."

"I know the position of US President George Bush and it is positive," he continued, adding that the US business community also supported Russia's bid for WTO membership.

"On the professional level everyone is clear on everything. On the political level, concrete steps towards each other are needed."

According to the rules of the 149-state global trade body, prospective members have to sign bilateral agreements with trade

partners before they are allowed to join.

Russia still has to sign bilateral agreements with the United States and Colombia.

Washington has insisted that Russia improve protection of intellectual property rights and lower taxes on airplane imports.

Russia and the United States have also failed to reach an agreement on changing Russian legislation for the banking sector, which forces foreign banks to establish branches as Russian legal entities.

"We believe that this is not acceptable since it does not allow to control the financial flow in the Russian Federation," Putin said.

Russia was hoping to sign all bilateral agreements by 2005 but had to postpone until 2006 because of stumbling blocks in negotiations with the United States.



A man looks at TV sets, broadcasting live the annual press conference of the Russian President Vladimir Putin in an electronics store in Moscow yesterday. Putin said at his press conference that leaders of all the Group of Eight (G8) countries had agreed unanimously that Russia belonged in the group despite its relative poverty.

Hamas accuses West of blackmail

AFP, Gaza City

Hamas accused the West of blackmail Tuesday after the major players in the peace process told it to renounce violence and recognise Israel's right to exist or else see funding to the Palestinians cut.

The United States, United Nations, European Union and Russia (known as the Middle East quartet) warned at talks in London on Monday that payments could be slashed if the winner of last week's general election did not radically alter its principles before entering government.

The victory of the radical Islamist movement, behind dozens of suicide attacks in a five-year uprising, has already led Israel to warn that it will have no dealings with a Palestinian Authority which includes "terrorists" and to sit on customs revenues that it should hand over.

Hamas has made clear that its embrace of democracy will not lead it to give up its "right to resist Israeli occupation", even though it has not carried out any attacks for

more than a year.

"The international aid which is offered to our people is a humanitarian need for the Palestinian people who are still living under Israeli occupation," Ismail Haniya, who led the list of Hamas candidates in last week's election, told AFP.

"This aid should not be linked to unfair conditions," he added.

While funding would continue for the time being, the quartet said "it was inevitable that future assistance to any new government would be reviewed by donors against that government's commitment to the principles of non-violence, recognition of Israel, and acceptance of previous agreements and obligations."

Hamas's overall leader, the Damascus-based Khaled Meshaal, said the attempts by the West to force change on Hamas were doomed to failure.

"Our message to the US and EU governments is this: your attempt to force us to give up our principles or our struggle is in vain," Meshaal wrote in Britain's Guardian newspaper.

Myanmar constitution talks close until late 2006

AFP, Yangon

Myanmar's military rulers on Tuesday adjourned constitutional talks until later this year, delegates said, as diplomats in Yangon questioned the junta's commitment to implementing any democratic reforms.

An ethnic leader and delegate quoted the chairman of the talks, Lieutenant General Thein Sein, as saying: "The National Convention will be resumed at the end of this year."

The delegate, who declined to be identified, speculated that Thein Sein meant December. Another delegate confirmed that the talks had adjourned, adding they would resume "by the end of the year."

The junta says the talks on drawing up a new constitution are the first step in its self-proclaimed "road map" to democracy for a nation which has been ruled by the military since 1962.

The talks have been held sporadically for more than a decade but have been condemned internationally for failing to include opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy.

Kenya outraged by Kiwi 'dog food' relief

AFP, Nairobi

Officials in drought-stricken Kenya reacted with outrage Tuesday to a plan by a New Zealand woman to send "dog food" for starving children, but she said her food is fit for people.

Describing the idea as "absurd," "insulting," "offensive" and "immoral," officials vehemently rejected the donation for children threatened by famine and said they would put measures in place to prevent any similar assistance.

The would-be donor, Christine Drummond, has told the New Zealand media her donation differed from the pet food, though made with the same ingredients, and she and her children eat it.

"It is immoral, it is unacceptable," said Special Programmes Minister John Munyee, who is coordinating the government's response to the drought that has put up to four million people in the east African nation at risk of starvation.

"I am very much offended, it is in bad taste," he told AFP. "It is unacceptable and we should not even be discussing such a demean-

ing thing."

"Even if we have famine in this corner of the world, it does not reduce us to dogs," said Colonel Shem Amadi, the head of Kenya's National Operations Centre, an emergency response unit in President Mwai Kibaki's office.

"People from that corner of the world have no respect for some of us," he told AFP.

"Oh no, it is horrible, it is terrible," said Khadija Abdalla, head of the Garris Provincial Hospital in one of the worst-hit areas of north-east Kenya where at least 40 people have died since December of drought-related causes.

"It is insulting us because we are poor," she told AFP.

"We appreciate when people are willing to help us, but they should be sensitive about our culture," said government spokesman Alfred Mutua.

"Telling us that you are giving us food for dogs in our culture is an insult of the highest order," he told AFP. "Maybe, she was trying to help, but I hope this offer is a result of naivety."

Iraq summons Danish ambassador over cartoon flak

AFP, Baghdad

Foreign Minister Hoshiyar Zebari summoned Denmark's ambassador Tuesday to hear Iraq's condemnation of cartoons of Prophet Mohammed in a Danish newspaper deemed offensive to Islam, the ministry said.

"The Iraqi government condemns the offense and the lack of respect expressed by the Danish publication and insists on the necessity of respecting the feelings and religious beliefs of Muslims," Zebari was quoted as saying.

The ministry, in a statement, said Zebari in his meeting with ambassador Kristian Oldenburg also called for the Danish government to "take initiatives regarding Arab countries and Muslims to resolve this crisis".

On the bilateral front, however, he welcomed Copenhagen's decision last week to renew the man-

date of its 530 soldiers posted in Iraq as part of the US-led multinational force.

On September 30, Danish newspaper Jyllands-Posten published 12 cartoons entitled "The faces of Mohammed", provoking a firestorm of anger in the Muslim world.

The controversy was further ignited by the decision of a Norwegian magazine to reprint the cartoons on January 10.

An Iraqi militant group purportedly called Monday on its members to attack any reachable Danish and Norwegian targets, in response to the publishing of the cartoons.

Copenhagen, which has so far refused to apologise for the cartoons and defended freedom of expression, has started taking measures to protect its citizens living in Muslim countries.

The editor of the Danish newspaper at the root of the crisis apologised on Monday.



A Pakistani policewoman arrests an activist of the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) during a demonstration in Lahore yesterday. Police arrested scores of activist supporters of former Pakistan premier Benazir Bhutto in protest against the Interpol notice for her arrest. Interpol had issued the international notices following a request by the Pakistan government for the arrest of Bhutto and her husband on corruption charges, according to officials in Islamabad.

Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh Land and Assets Section. Leasing Notice. Includes details of leasing terms, dates, and contact information for Md. Fazlul Haque, Director (Administration).