

Police use teargas against marchers in Indian Kashmir

AFP, Srinagar

Police in Indian Kashmir used teargas and batons to break up a Muslim Moharram procession and arrested 80 people, including two top separatists, police and witnesses said Wednesday.

The procession comes two days ahead of the anniversary of the martyrdom of Prophet Mohammed's grandson Imam Hussain in the Muslim month of Moharram nearly 1,400 years ago.

Some 100 people led by Kashmir's Shiite leader Molvi Abbas Ansari gathered in summer capital Srinagar's busy Maulana Azad Road, reciting verses from the Koran and chanting "Hussain, Hussain."

They were joined by Javed Mir, a senior leader of Kashmir's main separatist alliance the All Parties Hurriyat Conference (APHC), of which Ansari is also an executive member.

Hundreds protest against US outside Turkish port

AFP, Ankara

Hundreds of people demonstrated outside Turkish port yesterday where the US military has been unloading equipment ahead of a possible war on Iraq.

Police fired warning shots in the air to impose order on the crowd of around 300 demonstrators, some of whom were chanting "Yankee go home" while others waved banners reading "No to war."

Turkish television showed scuffles between police and demonstrators in the southern port of Iskenderun, and Anatolia news agency said several were later taken in for questioning.

Polls show the overwhelming majority of Turks are opposed to US plans for a war against Iraq to dislodge the regime of President Saddam Hussein.

Parliament has rejected a US request to let around 60,000 US troops into the country for an attack on Iraq, although Turkey's new prime minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan hinted Tuesday he could send a second request to the legislature.

Britain brushes off Rumsfeld's comments to 'go alone'

REUTERS, London

Britain said yesterday that the United States knew it could count on significant British military support in a Gulf war, after Washington's signal that it might attack Iraq on its own.

Responding to Tuesday's comments by Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld on a possible unilateral US attack, British Defence Secretary Geoff Hoon said Rumsfeld had been speaking only hypothetically.

"What he was clearly talking about was a theoretical possibility that British forces might not be involved," Hoon told BBC Radio.

"But as he said very clearly in his statement, he has every reason to believe there will be a significant military contribution from the United Kingdom."

Rumsfeld said on Tuesday that if for domestic reasons Britain could not participate, "there are work-arounds and they (the British) would not be involved, at least in that phase..."

A US defence official said the remarks had provoked a "firestorm" of reaction from British officials.

Rumsfeld later issued a statement expressing confidence that the forces of America's most prominent ally would be side-by-side with US troops should an attack take place.

A US decision to go it alone would be slap in the face for beleaguered

British Prime Minister Tony Blair, who has gone out on a limb and sparked a revolt in his own Labour Party to support President Bush in his hawkish stance on Iraq.

Scores of Labour parliamentarians are urging Blair to compromise on a controversial second UN resolution which might authorise war against Baghdad.

Hoon suggested that even if the Security Council failed to pass a second resolution, Britain and the United States might wage war on the basis of resolution 1441, passed in November in a bid to make Iraq comply with UN demands on disarmament.

"Certainly it is possible to read 1441 in that way," Hoon said. "We have not got to that stage. We have not taken that decision. We are still working for that second resolution."

"But it's equally clear we cannot allow Iraq to string us along with minor concessions, endless delays..."

The British government has always said it would be prepared to go to war without a fresh resolution, although it insists it would prefer a second UN mandate if possible.

The United States and Britain currently have more than 250,000 troops gathered in the Gulf region around Iraq.

Of those, just 25,000 are British although the government in London has committed a total of around 42,000 military personnel, including ground troops, to the potential war effort.



PHOTO: AFP
British airmen of the 51st Sqn Royal Air Force regiment patrol in the Kuwaiti desert while a Puma helicopter takes off during a practice air assault operation designed to capture an enemy airfield, outside Kuwait City, March 11, 2003.

Indonesian court convicts East Timor's ex-army chief

REUTERS, Jakarta



PHOTO: AFP
Indonesian former military chief for Dili, Brigadier General Nur Muis (C) smiles to journalists after a human rights trial jailed him for five years for crime against humanity during the territory's breakaway from Jakarta in 1999.

10-year jail term for the ex-army chief. The crime carries the maximum penalty of death.

Moeis, a colonel when the alleged crimes took place, told reporters he would appeal.

Two security officers and two civilians out of 15 suspects to have received verdicts prior to Moeis have been convicted. Those verdicts are subject to appeal.

Prosecutors had said that while Moeis was not an active perpetrator, he did nothing to stop the violence by pro-Jakarta militiamen who were backed by elements of the Indonesian military.

The militia groups went on a rampage after the poll in which East Timorese overwhelmingly voted to break away from Indonesia. The United Nations estimates 1,000 people were killed.

East Timor, a former Portuguese colony, was run by the UN after the independence vote until May last year when it was declared formally independent.

Doctor suspected of helping al-Qaeda freed

AFP, Quetta

An Iraqi doctor arrested by Pakistani and US intelligence agents five months ago on suspicion of treating al-Qaeda extremists has been released, his family said Tuesday.

Shaukat Nafay, who has lived in this south-west provincial capital for some 20 years, was dropped at his house at 10:00 pm (1700 GMT) Monday, his son Mustafa told AFP.

"My father was released... he is OK," Mustafa told reporters claiming around his home.

Nafay was taken from his home by Western and Pakistani agents in a pre-dawn raid on October 15. Authorities believed he had treated al-Qaeda fighters, hundreds of whom fled across the border into Pakistan from Afghanistan after the US-led military operation to kill and capture them began in late 2001.

His wife had briefly challenged his detention in court but dropped the case without explanation.

Nafay's family refused to allow reporters inside the house to meet him, saying they were under "tremendous pressure" not to talk to the media about his detention.

He said his father was safe and

mentally and physically.

Pakistani and US intelligence agencies jointly tracking down al-Qaeda suspects have arrested several doctors on suspicion of treating, supporting or harbouring al-Qaeda fugitives.

An eminent orthopaedic surgeon, Amir Aziz, was held for 30 days last year after being whisked away from outside his hospital by Pakistani and US agents. Aziz said afterwards that he was grilled by US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) investigators on links with al-Qaeda and whether he had assisted them in the manufacture of chemical or biological weapons.

Another Lahore doctor, Ahmed Javed Khawaja, his brother, three sons and his nephew were taken from their home in a midnight raid in December and accused of harbouring at least four North African al-Qaeda suspects.

Khawaja and his brother are still being held and are about to be tried under anti-terrorism laws, which forbid the harbouring of suspected terrorists.

Pakistan's top spy agency the Inter Services Intelligence (ISI) said Monday it had arrested 442 foreign al-Qaeda suspects since the war on terrorism began in the wake of the September 11, 2001 attacks.

Delhi police beefs up security in diplomatic enclave

THE STATESMAN/ANN

The Delhi Police yesterday issued prohibitory orders in and around the high security diplomatic enclave in the city. Though the police has not received any specific intelligence report about militant attack, there are fears that terrorist organisations might "try to carry out an attack on US Embassy in the wake of an imminent American attack on Iraq". The order will come into force from 15 March for a period of 60 days. The Statesman had carried a report on February 25 that Central intelligence agencies had asked the Delhi Police to step up security at all important US establishments.

The order signed by the police commissioner, Mr R S Gupta, has banned assembly of more than five persons, as well as the organisation of any public meeting, shouting slogans or making speeches in the high security area in Chanakyapuri.

The earlier report made by the intelligence agencies said militants belonging to Hizbul Mujahideen and Lashkar-e-Toiba might carry out an attack at one of the many US establishments in the city.

Intruder in Reuters Beijing bureau arrested

REUTERS, Beijing

A man who said he had a bomb burst into the Reuters news bureau in Beijing yesterday and held a number of journalists hostage for about two hours before releasing them unharmed. He was later arrested.

The intruder, complaining he had been wrongly diagnosed as mentally ill, demanded to be interviewed on camera about official corruption and other grievances. Around two hours after he freed the last of the Reuters staff, armed police arrested him.

The official Xinhua news agency quoted police sources as saying later the man did not have a bomb.

The well-groomed man, wearing dark glasses and carrying a bag trailing wires, barged his way into the sixth-floor office at around 10:30 a.m. (9:30 p.m. EST Tuesday), shouting Reuters staff around and shouting: "No one move! No one move!"

Giving his name as Fang Qinghui, he told the journalists he had timed his protest to coincide with the annual session of China's parliament, the National People's Congress, which runs until March 18.

Israel, US not worried about new Palestinian PM post

AFP, Jerusalem

Both countries want Arafat dropped as an obstacle to peace.

Israeli Foreign Minister Sylvan Shalom told US Secretary of State Colin Powell by telephone of his concerns about the limited powers to be granted to the new prime minister, Israel public television reported.

"If Arafat continues to concentrate the authority over security in his own hands, there will be no improvement in relations between Israel and the Palestinians," Shalom warned.

In Washington, State Department spokesman Richard Boucher said it remained to see what Abbas, a moderate who has earned the scorn of hardliners by calling on them to suspend attacks on Israel, would do with his powers.

"Obviously what is most important is what the prime minister will do with the authority given him by the (Palestinian legislative) council and what actually takes place on the ground," Boucher said.

"We've underscored the importance of full empowerment as the best way to provide leadership able to help move the Palestinian people towards President (George W.) Bush's vision of a viable, democratic and independent Palestine, living side by side with Israel in peace and security."

The US had noted the "significant definition of powers" that will be held by the person who gets the job, "We look forward to seeing it work out in practice," Boucher said.

Washington also asked some 60 countries -- seen as allies in the US-led war on terror -- to expel Iraqis that it believes are operating as intelligence agents in their nations.

Both Russian, US, and Iraqi officials refused to speak on record on the subject, but the diplomatic sources told AFP that such a request was also relayed to Moscow but that Russia had turned it down.

Moscow has further suggested that it would also strike down any new amended proposal that still included the threat of the use of force against Iraq, where Moscow has massive oil interests.

Russia refuses request to expel Iraqi diplomats

AFP, Moscow

on the subject.

Meanwhile a Russian foreign ministry official said on record only that "we do not make any comments about private diplomatic communications" between Moscow and Washington.

Asked if the expulsions may come at a later date, the foreign ministry official said: "We just cannot comment."

The refusal comes as part of a general falling out between Moscow and Washington in recent weeks over the best ways to disarm Iraq's President Saddam Hussein's regime.

The Russian foreign ministry has threatened to veto a new US-British-Spanish resolution giving Iraq until Monday to prove that it is cooperating with weapons inspections or face war.

Moscow has further suggested that it would also strike down any new amended proposal that still included the threat of the use of force against Iraq, where Moscow has massive oil interests.



PHOTO: AFP
Actor Pierce Brosnan jokes with media before the premiere his film "Evelyn" at an event of the non-governmental organisation "Mensajeros de la paz" ("Peace messengers") in Madrid, March 11, 2003.