



PHOTO: AFP

Grade One students Fatema Ali (L), Noor Amer (C) and Mais Hussain (R), attend an Arabic Language class at the Biarik Elementary school for girls on the first day of school in Baghdad, following the US-led war on the country on Saturday. Iraqi pupils began making their way back to school as teachers said they were unsure what to teach in the post-Saddam Hussein era and parents worried about security in the chaotic capital.

## Asian health workers revered as heroes

AFP, Hong Kong

Asia's health workers are rapidly becoming to SARS what New York's firefighters were to September 11 -- revered as heroic front-line troops prepared to risk their lives in the name of serving the public.

Doctors and nurses have shown a compassion and single-minded devotion to caring for victims struck down by Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome, which has touched the hearts of millions of Asians.

While loved ones were warned against visiting patients to avoid becoming infected with the disease that has killed 435 people and infected more than 6,000 worldwide since erupting in China last November, medics have courageously stuck to their task of caring for the sick.

As a result, hundreds of doctors and nurses have themselves been struck down and at least seven have died from the pneumonia-like illness which has no cure or vaccine.

Despite the deaths and the imminent risks to their own health,

doctors and nurses continue to labour tirelessly at hospitals.

Their dedication and bravery has drawn comparisons to New York firefighters who marched into the smoking twin towers of the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001, after terrorists turned passenger aircraft into flying bombs and levelled the buildings, in a bid to save the lives of trapped civilians while fully aware they may not emerge with their own.

Peter Cameron, an Australian doctor who heads the emergency ward at Hong Kong's Prince of Wales Hospital -- where some of the territory's first SARS cases were recorded -- said his staff's dedication was incredible.

"It was incredible to see staff turning up to work each day despite the fact that, in the first two weeks of this experience, each day four or five more staff members would succumb to the illness."

The firefighters were acclaimed heroes, and governments and the public are granting the same status to brave medical workers who have succumbed to SARS while caring for patients.

## Beijing takes action to stop SARS spread

AP, Beijing

Beijing will keep elementary and middle schools closed for an additional two weeks to help prevent the spread of SARS, the government said Sunday.

China also decided to let the World Health Organisation visit Taiwan in its fight against severe acute respiratory syndrome, putting aside politics after reports the island's number of SARS cases has doubled in a week.

China did not explain its decision regarding Taiwan. But it may have been part of its recent effort to appear more cooperative.

China earlier rejected direct WHO help for the island, a refusal that island said was threatening its efforts to fight the disease. At least 102 people have been diagnosed with SARS in Taiwan, including eight who have died.

Eighteen new deaths were reported Saturday in East Asia, pushing the global death toll to 436. Nine deaths were in mainland China and nine were in Hong Kong.

Announcing the decision to keep schools in Beijing closed, the official Xinhua News Agency said authorities planned to hold correspondence classes for the students using TV broadcasts and the Internet.

The schools, which were closed about two weeks ago, had been scheduled to reopen on May 7 providing the SARS outbreak was under control.

But on Saturday, the Health Ministry reported a total of 181 new cases on the mainland and nine new fatalities, pushing China's toll to 190. Five of the deaths were reported in Beijing, bringing the death toll in the capital to 96.

Nine other deaths were reported in Hong Kong, pushing the global death count to 436. Worldwide, more than 6,100 people have been infected by SARS.

Hong Kong's health chief acknowledged that officials "weren't speedy enough" in their response to the SARS outbreak, but said it was because little was known about the disease when it

# Iraq descends deeper into turmoil

### ICRC demands access to all PoWs

AFP, Baghdad

With fear mounting of an impending humanitarian disaster and security worsening, the International Committee of the Red Cross demanded Sunday access to Iraqi prisoners held by US-British coalition forces.

"The ICRC still does not have access to all the prisoners and detainees in the country," said Nana Doumani, the organisation's spokeswoman in Baghdad.

"The parties must respect the Geneva Convention on prisoners," she pleaded.

US Central Command in Qatar announced Saturday that 342 more PoWs had been released, taking the total number set free to 5,745.

Nearly 3,600 Iraqis prisoners remained in detention.

Doumani said about 2,000 people had been arrested for common law offences in the capital since April 10, the day after coalition forces entered and mass looting erupted.

The ICRC has also been denied access to former senior Iraqi officials who have either surrendered or been captured by the coalition forces, including deputy prime minister Tareq Aziz.

The UN chief of mission warned that Iraq is still ripe for a humanitarian disaster even though the shooting has all but stopped, noting that too many people were going without food, water and power.

"The conditions for the development of a humanitarian disaster still exist," Ramiro Lopes da Silva said Saturday.

"It's (already) a humanitarian disaster in the sense basic services have collapsed or are at the risk of collapsing if we don't put them back into shape rather quickly," he said.

Lopes da Silva, who returned to Baghdad on Thursday with other UN

officials who fled two days before the war began on March 20, said nearly two-thirds of Iraqis totally depended on food aid. Malnutrition was rampant.

And the director of British charity Oxfam accused US-led forces of failing to do enough to protect aid workers.

"At the moment it's very high risk for our staff to be in Iraq... that's not good enough," Barbara Stocking told BBC radio on Saturday.

"We need the coalition forces to provide the security, and we need them also to do something about the mines and the unexploded ordnance that there is around."

"The occupying power has to provide the security and they are not. That's their legal obligation under the Geneva Conventions," Stocking said.

Despite the presence of 12,000 US soldiers in Baghdad and the planned deployment of up to 4,000 more, security has deteriorated in the city where weapons are easily available and an effective police force has yet to be set up.

In Baghdad's Sadr City, a huge Shiite slum of two million people, hospital officials voice fears for their safety.

"There are large numbers of thieves, drug addicts and accounts are being settled," said Dr Samer Salah al-Khan, noting that "new gangs have appeared."

Several journalists among the hundreds of foreign media in Baghdad have been robbed.

The capital's interim police chief, Zuhair al-Nuaimi, resigned Saturday, saying young blood was needed. He urged Iraqis to work closely with US forces.

Meanwhile, several dozen Iraqis staged a rare rally in Baghdad Sunday to thank the United States for removing Saddam Hussein.



PHOTO: AFP

Crew members (L) accompanied by healthcare workers arrive in Hong Kong from the Malaysian cargo ship *Bunga Belawis Satu* after they are feared to have contracted the deadly Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) virus on Sunday. Twenty Hong Kong healthcare workers and firemen wearing full protective gear boarded the ship and conducted medical checks on the crew and later transferred them to a hospital to determine whether they had contracted the SARS virus.

## Iraqis still in dark

AFP, Baqubah

The United States is failing to get its message to the people of Iraq, according to residents who say they know nothing about the momentous changes in their own towns, let alone Baghdad.

"I watch(ed) Iranian TV and that's where I get my news about the American plans for Iraq. It tells us we must fight the Americans and kill them," said Mustafah Mohammed, 50, who lives just 40 km north of Baghdad in Baqubah.

"The Americans tell us nothing. We need more information about what is happening."

Mohammed was one of dozens of curious onlookers standing outside a barbed-wire fence surrounding a government building in Baqubah which the Americans occupied a week ago.

As he spoke, a US military civil affairs team began handing out pamphlets depicting the country's volatile mix of religious and ethnic groups superimposed over a map of Iraq, under an Arabic message of unity.

Children clamoured for a copy, pressing into the wire and shouting "Mister! Mister!" to the young female soldier on the other side of the fence, who said nothing.

"What does this mean?" asked 15-year-old Mohammed Sulayman, a student who has not been to school since US forces moved into Baghdad on April 9 and toppled the regime of Saddam Hussein.

Another man read the "Proclamation to the People of Iraq" from Lieutenant General David McKiernan, a three-paragraph statement which began circulating in Baghdad 10 days earlier.

"As the head authority in Iraq, I call for the immediate cessation of all criminal activity to include acts of reprisal, looting and attacks on coalition forces," the statement in English and Arabic reads.

It affirms the coalition's commitment to "restoring security, stability and rapidly repairing Iraq's damaged infrastructure," and implores people to "immediately return to work."

## Stranded ISS crew return off target

REUTERS, Astana

A US-Russian space crew, stranded in orbit by the US Columbia tragedy, landed in Kazakhstan on Sunday, but rescuers found them more than two hours later because their capsule missed its landing target.

Mission control said Americans Ken Bowersox and Donald Pettit and Russia's Nikolai Budarin touched down in the Kazakh steppe after almost six months in space.

But mission control held its breath until rescuers scouring the Kazakh steppe in planes and helicopters found them about two hours after the landing.

"Rescue planes have spotted the capsule from the air. The capsule hatch is open," a relieved official at mission control said. "We have radio contact with the crew. Thank God, they are all alive and well."

He added the Soyuz had landed

in a remote spot north of the Aral Sea, some 310 miles short of its target, an unusually large stretch of tundra.

It was not clear why the capsule missed its planned landing site, some 55 miles north of Arkalyk in Kazakhstan.

Rescuers quoted by Itar-Tass news agency said they found the crew standing by the capsule waving to them. The crew is due to be taken to the Kazakh capital Astana and later flown to Moscow.

Mission control is usually flooded with applause as crews return safely. Early on Sunday it was silent as experts struggled to understand what was happening.

Experts at mission control said the capsule probably came down in a steeper, so-called ballistic descent, increasing the force of gravity. They added the Soyuz's communication system may have been disrupted by the descent, cutting links with the ground and slowing down rescue efforts.

## Finding WMD in Iraq just 'a matter of time': Bush

AFP, Crawford

US President George W. Bush said Saturday it was just "a matter of time" before US troops find banned Iraqi arms, as he praised Australian Prime Minister John Howard for backing Saddam Hussein's ouster.

During a meeting at Bush's secluded Texas ranch, the two leaders also agreed to use dialogue to end the crisis over North Korea's nuclear weapons after being briefed in person by US envoy James Kelly, an Australian official said.

Bush and Howard, who won a coveted invitation to the "Prairie Chapel" ranch by being one of four leaders to send combat troops to Iraq, traded compliments during a chimney press conference against a backdrop of hay bales and a barn.

The US leader, who gave his guest a pair of monogrammed cowboy boots bearing a map of Australia, paid Howard the "biggest compliment" possible in his home state, telling him: "You're kind of like a Texan."

## Giant crowds in Madrid as Pope canonises 5 new saints

AFP, Madrid

Hundreds of thousands of worshippers flocked to central Madrid on Sunday for a spectacular open air mass where Pope John Paul II canonised five new Spanish saints.

Greeted with a roar of approval from the adoring crowd, the 82-year-old pontiff arrived shortly before 10:00 am (0800 GMT) for the ceremony, which organisers expected to draw up to a million people from across the historically Catholic country.

Entire families had set up camp in the Spanish capital's Colon square, spending Saturday night in the open air to await the two-hour canonisation mass, the highlight of the pope's two-day visit.

## 'N Korea has 100 N-arms aimed at US'

AFP, Sydney

North Korea has at least 100 nuclear missiles aimed at the United States and will use them if new economic sanctions are imposed against it, a propagandist for the Stalinist state claimed Sunday. Kim Myong Chol, who styles himself executive director of the Centre for Korea-American Peace, said: "It's quite obvious North Korea may have minimum 100 nuclear warheads, maximum 300. They all lock onto American cities."

Kim, who rejoices in the title "unofficial spokesman for North Korea", was speaking in an interview recorded by Australia's Channel Nine network overseas, although it was unclear in which country.

He said he was flattered the western media had given him that label adding: "The news magazines call me a spin doctor for North Korea and Kim Jong (President Kim Jong-Il). It's an honourable title for me."

Asked if North Korea intended to use the weapons if the United States did not give in to its current demands he replied: "If the US attacks North Korea, North Korea will definitely use those nuclear weapons against the US mainland."

Would it also use them if an economic embargo was imposed?

"Yes, definitely," he said. "North Korea will use those nuclear weapons against the US mainland if America imposes additional economic sanctions on North Korea."

He claimed the nuclear technology used to make the missiles had been tested in Pakistan and the weapons had been produced before Pyongyang's non-proliferation agreement made with the former US administration in 1994.

They had not, therefore, breached international agreements, he maintained.

Told that Pakistan had denied the claim it was implicated, which he had made previously, Kim said: "Of course they must deny that."

He also rejected a charge by Australian Foreign Minister Alexander Downer last week that an official of North Korea's ruling political party was aboard a North Korean ship accused of smuggling heroin to Australia.

The freighter, *Pong Su*, was boarded and seized by Australian special forces troops on April 20 after a chase which began when it allegedly unloaded the heroin off southeastern Australia five days previously.

Some 26 North Korean crew remain in custody charged with helping import 50 kilograms (110 pounds) of pure heroin into Australia.

"I'm afraid the Australian Foreign Minister is entirely wrong," Kim said.

"The ship may be a North Korean ship, the strong likelihood is that the ship was simply used by some evil forces to traffic heroin. This doesn't mean the North Korean government was involved here."

## Truce accord takes effect in Ivory Coast

AP, Abidjan

A new ceasefire agreement took effect in Ivory Coast on Sunday, just hours after rebels accused government forces of fresh attacks.

A rebel leader who holds a seat in the country's new power-sharing government declared a "complete and total cessation of hostilities across the entire national territory."

"This is the end of the war," Michel Gueu said after the signing Saturday, although he warned that "uncontrollable elements" might remain in Ivory Coast's western borderlands with Liberia - the scene of the conflict's heaviest battles.

The agreement took effect just after midnight Saturday. Neither rebel nor government officials were immediately available for comment on whether there was any fighting.

But earlier Saturday, rebel spokesman Antoine Beugre accused the government of launching a last-ditch offensive at Danane, in Ivory Coast's west.



PHOTO: AFP

Wayne Cooper, the Master Chief Warrant officer for the 588 engineer battalion, takes a photo on Sunday of a United Nations tag on a 262mm rocket that had come out of its casing after it was reportedly left abandoned in a planting field some 35 km southeast of Baquba in central Iraq by Iraqi forces seven days after the war with coalition forces started. Officers from the Army are saying these rockets are capable of delivering chemical or biological agents. The soldiers from the 2-8 Infantry battalion have collected a large variety of unexploded ordnance ranging from 60mm mortars to these rockets since their arrival in the region a week ago.