

Canadian journalist 'beaten to death'

BBC ONLINE

Iran has said a Canadian-Iranian photojournalist was beaten to death after her arrest outside a prison in Tehran.

Vice President Ali Abtahi said Zahra Kazemi died "of a brain haemorrhage resulting from beatings".

Ms Kazemi, 54, was detained on 23 June for taking pictures of Tehran's Evin prison where many dissidents are jailed.

She was later admitted to hospital, but was pronounced brain dead after falling into a coma.

The Iranian authorities initially said she had died of a stroke after falling ill during her first police interview.

But Ms Kazemi's relatives insisted she had been beaten into a coma by her interrogators.

Iran's President Mohammad Khatami ordered four ministers to investigate the death of the freelance photographer.

Ms Kazemi, who held an Iranian passport, was in Tehran to take pictures of the recent student protests for the British agency Camera Press.

Another US soldier killed in Iraq

Senate Democrats blast Bush on Iraq

REUTERS, Abu Ghraib, Washington

One US soldier was killed and two were wounded on Wednesday when a bomb exploded near a highway just west of the Iraqi capital Baghdad, US soldiers on the scene said.

The fatality brought to 147 the number of US servicemen killed by hostile fire in Iraq since the invasion to topple president Saddam Hussein -- the same number of troops the United States lost in the 1991 Gulf war over Kuwait.

"We were driving by in a convoy and we heard a big explosion. As the convoy passed that truck over there it blew up," Specialist Jose Colon told Reuters.

The two wounded men were treated on the highway. US soldiers stood guard, pointing their machineguns toward the edge of the road and peering through binoculars for other possible attackers.

One soldier put his arm around another and comforted him as he cried while sitting on the barrier that divides the highway. About 40 Iraqis walked out of their neighbourhood and watched.

The blast is the latest in a spate of increasingly bold guerrilla-style attacks. US forces have come under daily attacks in recent weeks which have continued despite a crackdown by US troops in areas to the Northeast and north of the capital, once a hotbed for Saddam loyalists.

Senate Democrats criticised President Bush on Tuesday for spiralling costs of the Iraq war and for not seeking more international help in Iraq's rebuilding in the face of skyrocketing US budget deficits.

The charges came as the White House tried to deflect accusations that it exaggerated intelligence on Iraq's weapons to justify the war and announced that the federal deficit will balloon to a record \$455 billion this fiscal year.

Sen. Mark Dayton, a Minnesota Democrat, said the deficit grew from "the most colossal financial mismanagement that's ever been written in this country's history," and called for "a clear, direct and reliable accounting" of the war's costs.

The Senate was debating a \$369 billion bill to fund the Pentagon for the next fiscal year that ignores the \$5 billion monthly costs of operations in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Republicans said those costs will be dealt with in separate emergency spending bills, including the \$60 billion measure Congress passed in April.

Senate Minority Leader Tom Daschle, a South Dakota Democrat, broadened his call for a congressional inquiry into the administration's handling of post-war Iraq with mounting US casualties and into its intelligence on Iraq's weapons including the discredited claim that Baghdad tried to buy uranium in Africa.



A US soldier covers the body of a comrade, killed following an explosion along the highway leading to the flashpoint town of Fallujah, west of Baghdad. PHOTO: AFP



Palestinian boys, wearing Hamas headbands, hold posters with pictures of jailed fellow Palestinians in front of a huge portrait of Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat during a march in Gaza City July 16. PHOTO: AFP

Palestinian children want their fathers, brothers freed from jails

AFP, Gaza City

At least 1,500 Palestinian children took to the streets here Wednesday to demand the release of thousands of Palestinian prisoners held by Israel in a march organized by the radical movement Hamas.

The children, in their teens and less, wearing green caps and headbands marked with the slogan, "There is no God but Allah and Mohammed is His prophet," waved large Hamas flags.

Some also carried handwritten cardboard signs in Arabic and English.

"Father, I am waiting for you", "Oh world, help Palestinian prisoners", "I want my dad", and "With tens of thousands of prisoners in Israeli jails, where is peace?" they read.

Other children carried framed photographs of their jailed brothers or fathers, mostly Hamas militants, as small groups brandished a poster of 14 top Hamas militants

determined by Israel.

Rights organizations estimate Israel currently detains about 6,000 Palestinians, most of them arrested since the September 2000 start of the intifada, or uprising.

Israel agreed last week to free 350 prisoners but ruled out the release of militants belonging to Hamas or its smaller rival Islamic Jihad.

Palestinian minister for prisoners affairs Hisham Abdelrazaq said Monday that Israel and the Palestinians had reached a stalemate over the release of prisoners and international intervention was needed to resolve the issue.

Yehia Daas, 12, said his father was serving a five-year sentence in Israel for his activities in Hamas.

"I have seen him once in five years, we can only go every six months and the journey to Israel is very difficult with the closure," he said.

ICC will not investigate war crimes in Iraq

AFP, The Hague

The International Criminal Court (ICC) will not investigate allegations of war crimes committed by US troops in Iraq because they do not fall within its jurisdiction, the prosecutor said Wednesday.

"We have received communications about acts allegedly perpetrated by US troops in Iraq but we are not mandated to prosecute such acts since neither Iraq or the United States are states party to the court," Luis Moreno Ocampo said.

The ICC became a legal reality in July of last year. It is mandated to try genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity. The court can only hear cases concerning events that occurred after July 1, 2002.

The court can only act in cases involving nationals of states that

have ratified the ICC statute or events that occurred on their territories.

Washington has vehemently opposed the court, fearing politically-motivated prosecution of its citizens or military personnel. It has not ratified the ICC statute.

Washington has suspended more than 47 million dollars in military aid to 35 countries for their failure or refusal to give US citizens immunity from the tribunal.

Moreno Ocampo said the court had also received complaints concerning nationals who are part of the US-led coalition fighting in Iraq, like Britain.

But the court has to first determine if the national authorities concerned are unwilling or unable to investigate. Only then can the ICC step in, the prosecutor said.

US forces escape attack in Afghanistan

AFP, Bagram Air Base

An apparently timed explosive device exploded near a US convoy in southeastern Afghanistan's Khost province but caused no casualties, a US military spokesman said Wednesday.

"An improvised explosive device detonated near a Special Operation Forces convoy south of Khost in Khost province (Tuesday)," Lieutenant Colonel Douglas Leforge told reporters at Bagram Air Base, 50 kilometers (31 miles) north of Kabul.

The device was the second targeting US forces in Afghanistan this week and was likely set up as a remote-controlled or time device not a pressure bomb, which would have damaged the vehicle.

US approves sanctions on Myanmar

AFP, Washington, Yangon

Both houses of the United States Congress have now voted in favour of imposing economic sanctions on Myanmar following the detention in May of pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi.

The almost unanimous vote by the lower house of Congress on Tuesday in favour of slapping a raft of sanctions on Burma mirrors similar measures approved by the US Senate a month ago.

Once the two houses have merged their versions of the act, and Mr Bush signs it, specified imports will be banned and the country's assets in the US frozen.

Myanmar's textile and clothing industry is likely to be hardest hit by the measures, which were welcomed by some opposition groups in exile.

But a representative of the International Labour Organisation in Yangon, Hong Trang Perret-Nguyen, told the BBC: "Whether it

will have an impact on the leadership is not clear at all".

Congress shied away from imposing similar sanctions last year when Aung San Suu Kyi was released from 19 months of house detention.

But her detention at the end of May and the suppression of her movement, the National League for Democracy, has quickly hardened attitudes in Washington.

Myanmar's junta condemned the economic sanctions, describing them as "weapons of mass destruction" that would create havoc.

A spokesman for the regime said in a statement titled "Sanctions Used as Weapons of Mass Destruction" that the measures would deprive people of job opportunities and hurt health care and education in the impoverished nation.

"Sanctions, in short, are imposed on target countries by the rich and powerful nations mainly

with the intention to create havoc and bring hardship on the mass population," he said.

Last week the junta sent Bush a petition signed by 350,000 textile workers appealing against the ban, which the Myanmar Times said would threaten annual exports worth 356 million dollars, mostly in the textile sector.

"A ban on imports from Myanmar could cut the country's export earnings by up to a third," the semi-official weekly said Monday.

The European Union has also imposed tighter sanctions on Myanmar, while the country's largest donor Japan has suspended new economic aid.

US Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for East Asia and the Pacific Randy Schriver on Wednesday criticised China's stance on Myanmar, saying it was isolated in its failure to condemn the junta and should use its leverage to push for change.

Indonesia on alert for fresh attacks by Jemaah Islamiah

REUTERS, Jakarta

Indonesia has issued a strong warning about possible attacks from the militant Jemaah Islamiah organization, urging Southeast Asia to be on alert for more action from the Muslim group blamed for the deadly Bali bombings.

Chief security minister Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono said one reason to be on guard was the escape from the Philippines of alleged Jemaah Islamiah bombmaker Fathur Rohman al-Ghozi, an Indonesian who broke out of a Manila prison on Monday.

Jemaah Islamiah, a regional group linked to al Qaeda, has been blamed for last year's Bali bombings which killed 202 people, mostly foreigners. It wants an Islamic state in parts of Southeast Asia.

"It's very possible that Jemaah

Islamiah, whose elements are spread throughout Southeast Asia, will carry out fresh criminal actions," Yudhoyono told a news conference.

"We cannot say terrorism in Indonesia and Southeast Asia has reduced. Moreover, from what we've found there are indications terrorist movements in Southeast Asia will tend to carry out more of the actions they have planned and prepared for."

Yudhoyono said he had ordered security tightened at key facilities across the world's most populous Muslim nation, partly in response to Monday's bombing at parliament, which hurt no one.

Police also arrested nine suspected Jemaah members in Indonesia last week and said they had foiled plots to attack churches and shops in Jakarta, a sprawling city of 10 million people.

Police seized a huge cache of explosives during the raids. They said they were hunting several more Jemaah militants.

The suspected militants had targeted eight strategic locations in Jakarta as part of their operations, police have said, without explaining what they intended to do.

The blast at parliament sprayed nails over a wide area, but wounded no one as the assembly was in recess and lightly staffed. Indonesia has not linked Jemaah to the blast.

Yudhoyono referred to trials of Jemaah leaders in Indonesia, including its alleged chief Abu Bakar Bashir, but did not say if he thought their verdicts could be a flashpoint. Bashir is on trial for treason but has not been charged over Bali.

SC orders CBI probe into Taj heritage affair

PTI, New Delhi

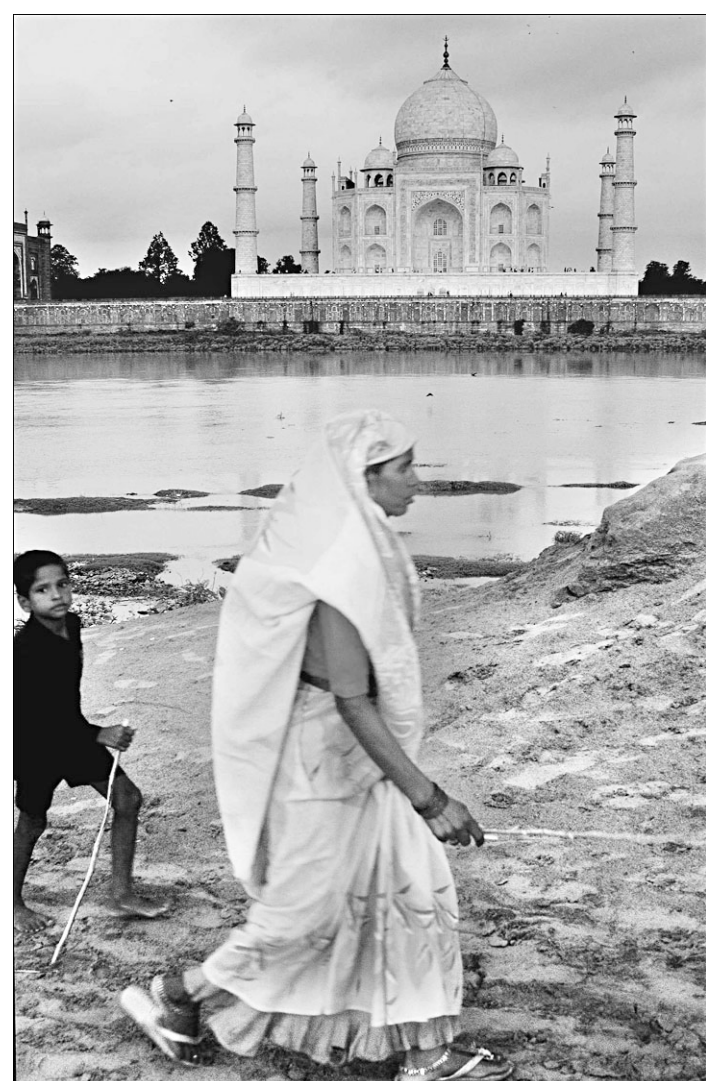
The Supreme Court in India on Wednesday ordered a CBI inquiry into the alleged illegality and irregularities in the construction of the controversial Taj heritage corridor at Agra by the Uttar Pradesh government and asked the agency to submit a report to the court within two months.

The bench, comprising Justice MB Shah and Justice AR Lakshmanan, said "the powers in UP instead of creating something new which could be classified as a world heritage monument is trying to demolish or endanger an existing world heritage monument by their hasty or irregular activities."

The bench took note of the fact that the detailed project report was neither approved by the central government and the environment ministry nor any of the experts of the field and said it was difficult to note who released the huge amount of public money for the construction of the illegal work.

"Considering all the aspects as well as the allegations made by existing council of the Uttar Pradesh government AK Agarwal, it appears that a detailed inquiry is necessary to be carried out by the CBI."

"We, therefore, direct the director of CBI to see that the inquiry about the illegality and irregularities regarding the corridor project is investigated and concerned officials are identified".



An Indian woman walks along the river bank at the back of the Taj Mahal at Agra. PHOTO: AFP

Emergency in Assam hit by worst floods

AFP, Assam

A state of emergency was declared in India's flood-hit northeastern state of Assam on Wednesday, with authorities describing the flooding as the worst in 50 years.

"Please treat this (floods) as an emergency as this is the biggest flood in 50 years," Assam Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi said in a letter of appeal for funds to the federal government.

"There may be further devastation in the coming days because flood-management structures throughout the state have been damaged by the two successive waves of floods this year," the letter warned.

At least 3.7 million people have been displaced in more than two weeks of devastating floods in Assam, which have swamped more than 20 of the states 24 districts.

Officials reported another three flood-related drownings on Tuesday, taking the death toll in the state to 28 since a second wave of flooding began on June 27 following lashing monsoon rains.

"Two children and an elderly person died in separate incidents after their boats capsized on Tuesday in the northern Darrang and eastern Dhemaji districts of Assam," a police official told AFP.

"All three victims drowned while trying to move to safer areas when floodwaters inundated their homes."

The Assam government Wednesday sought urgent aid from United Nations agencies as it battled to cope with those displaced by the rising waters.

"We are in desperate need of tarpaulins, polythene sheets, water purifying tablets as well as mosquito nets and utensils for thousands of flood-trapped people," the chief minister told AFP.

"UNICEF has been approached and the response was positive. We expect to get the materials before the end of the week."

The state's main river, the Brahmaputra, burst its banks at several new places overnight, flooding fresh areas in the state, Assam flood control minister Nurzamal Sarkar said.



Faithfuls wave to Pope John Paul II in the courtyard of his summer residence in Castelgandolfo, southeast of Rome, at the end of his traditional weekly audience, July 16. Pope John Paul II is to visit Slovakia in September on his third official visit to the eastern European state, the Vatican announced July 14. PHOTO: AFP

Anti-Muslim crimes in US up by 15 percent

IANs, Washington

Anti-Muslim incidents in the US have increased by 15 per cent over the previous year, according to a leading Muslim organisation in the country.

In a report released by the Council of American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), a Washington-based advocacy group, anti-Muslim violence, discrimination as well as harassment has been on the rise.

The number of incidents went up from 525 in 2001 to 602 in this year's study that covered the period from January 1 to December 31, 2002.

In addition to the direct acts of discrimination and violence, the report examined the impact of Washington's post-9/11 policies such as the USA Patriot Act, on anti-Muslim acts.

According to CAIR, these regulations have had a negative impact on the civil liberties of American Muslims.

Some of the government actions featured in the report include the March 2002 raids on Muslim families and businesses in Virginia and Georgia, the Special Registration programme for Muslim visa holders, and the "voluntary" interviews conducted with Iraqi-Americans.

Muslims reported the largest number of incidents in California, Florida, Virginia, New York, Ohio, Michigan, Texas, and Maryland, CAIR says. Along with religious and ethnic profiling, workplace discrimination was one of the largest categories of complaints.

"The daily experiences of Muslims in schools, workplace, airports, courts, and police included incidents in which they were singled out because of actual or perceived religious and ethnic identity," CAIR Research Director Mohamed Nimers said.

Nimer said that anti-Muslim sentiments related to the 9/11 terror attacks was cited in a number of cases.

Pakistani girl's condition stable, says Indian hospital

PTI, Bangalore

The condition of two-and-half year-old Noor Fatima, the Pakistani child on whom an open heart surgery was performed at a city hospital here, is "stable", hospital sources said.

"The baby is quite stable with all her vital parameters doing fine. She will be taken off the ventilator after reviewing her progress sometime in the afternoon," said sources at Narayana Hrudayalaya, where the surgery lasting nearly six hours was conducted on Tuesday.

Noor arrived here with her parents, Nadeem Sajjad and Tayyaba Nadeem, on Saturday and was admitted to the cardiac speciality hospital on the city outskirts.

A five-member team headed by Dr Rajesh Sharma, paediatric cardiac surgeon, operated upon Noor.