

'Indian PM receiving death threats from Kashmir rebels'

AFP, New Delhi

India's junior Home Minister Harkin Pathak Wednesday said two of the most formidable Islamic guerrilla groups fighting in Kashmir had issued death threats against the country's top leaders.

The alert came a day after one of the two groups Pathak named in parliament was charged with staging a suicide attack on a military camp in Kashmir which left four generals injured and a brigadier and seven other soldiers dead.

"Militant groups operating in Kashmir, especially the Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Mohammad, have been issuing threats against Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee and Deputy Prime Minister Lal Krishna Advani," he told the upper house.

Other Indian VIPs were also being threatened with similar death threats by the two heavily-armed guerrilla organisations, Pathak said in a statement.

Canadian journalist buried in Iran

BBC ONLINE

A Canadian journalist who died in custody in Iran has been buried there despite demands for her body to be returned to Canada, state media has reported.

Zahra Kazemi, an Iranian-Canadian, died as a result of a severe blow to the head on July 10 after her arrest in Tehran on June 23.

She was buried on Wednesday morning in the south-western city of Shiraz, the state news agency IRNA reported.

The Canadian Government had expressed concern over Iran's unwillingness to return her body to Canada, despite the wishes of both her Iranian and Canadian relatives.

Foreign Minister Bill Graham said that only the "full and swift prosecution" of those responsible for Ms Kazemi's death would "clearly demonstrate that [Iranian] officials are not allowed to act with impunity".



PHOTO: AFP

Iraqis reading the news July 23 in Baghdad of the deaths of fallen dictator Saddam Hussein's sons, Uday and Qusay, symbols of the old regime's cruelty, who died in a blistering six-hour battle with US troops Tuesday. The source who provided US troops with information placing Saddam Hussein's sons, Uday and Qusay, in a house in the northern city of Mosul, is under US protection, the US military said.

Hundreds gather outside villa where Uday, Qusay were killed

AP, Mosul

At least 1,000 people gathered outside the house of Nawaf al-Zaydan Muhammad some shouting in delight, others cursing in anger after American soldiers stormed the mansion and killed Saddam Hussein's two eldest sons.

The huge stone mansion, with mighty support columns, was riddled by bullet scars and gaping holes caused by rockets fired from helicopters.

"How can they do this?" shouted a man in the crowd, apparently more concerned with the property damage than the death of two of the cruelest men in Saddam's regime. Uday and Qusay Hussein. "What are the Americans doing destroying a house like this?"

The owner is a tribal sheik and a

cousin of Saddam.

Some Iraqis were delighted, while others cursed US soldiers who milled about as smoke wafted from the blown-out windows as the six-hour siege ended. Still others stood silently and appeared in mourning.

One American soldier walked in front of the house, his arm draped across the shoulder of an Iraqi man in white robes.

A man who witnessed the attack said it escalated with US helicopters called in after men in the house shot at US soldiers with a rocket-propelled grenade.

"There were gunshots from inside the house. The gunshots were coming from the people inside the house and the Americans were outside for half an hour," said the witness, who didn't give his name. "The people in the house fired an RPG-7 and then Americans

called helicopters, which attacked the house."

A similar account was given at the Pentagon.

When US troops entered the home's ground floor, they almost immediately came under fire from the four people holed up in the second floor, a senior defense official said in Washington, speaking on condition of anonymity.

The home's second floor had been hardened against attack with bullet-proof glass, the official said.

The US soldiers then called in an attack helicopter, which fired several missiles into the building, the official said.

Four soldiers were wounded in the assault, and flown to safety by US helicopters.

Now hunt is on for Saddam Hussein

REUTERS, Baghdad

The search for Saddam Hussein gained fresh impetus Wednesday after US soldiers killed his two sons Uday and Qusay in a fierce six-hour battle with machineguns and rockets at a villa in northern Iraq.

Celebratory shots rang out in Baghdad overnight, but skeptical Iraqis said they wanted proof of the deaths.

Lieutenant-General Ricardo Sanchez, commander of ground forces in Iraq, said he would provide evidence to show beyond doubt that the two men had been killed when 200 soldiers backed up by helicopters attacked the villa in Mosul Tuesday.

He told a news conference late Tuesday that the deaths of Uday and Qusay -- tracked down after a tip-off from a walk-in informant who stands to gain at least some of the two \$15 million rewards for information on their whereabouts -- showed that Saddam himself could not hide forever.

"It confirms that we will succeed in our hunt for former regime members, and in particular Saddam Hussein, wherever they are and however long it takes," he said.

Sanchez said the killings of Uday, 39, and Qusay, two years younger, would also deal a blow to guerrillas who have staged a wave of attacks and ambushes on US forces in Iraq, claiming the lives of 39 American soldiers since President Bush declared major combat over on May 1.

Paul Bremer, the US administrator of Iraq, said there was a risk of revenge attacks by Saddam loyalists.

"We could see attacks in the next few days as revenge. But you have to remember that a lot of the attacks that are taking place are being based on the idea that somehow the Saddams are coming back, that he and his sons are coming back," he said.

"Well, they're not coming back. But now two of them are dead. It

won't be long before we get the father."

Many Iraqis still doubted Saddam's sons were dead.

"I don't believe they are dead because Saddam would never let his sons travel together," said Nasheet Chalabi, who owns a grocery shop in Mosul.

US officials have blamed dihard Saddam loyalists for the guerrilla insurgency against American forces.

Other groups have also claimed responsibility for the attacks, distancing themselves from Saddam's secular Iraqi nationalism and embracing the Islamist, anti-American slogans of Osama bin Laden's al Qaeda network.

Wamidh Nazmi, a political science professor at Baghdad University, said the killings would not end guerrilla attacks.

"I do not think that Saddam and his two sons are a very important part of the resistance...and if they have any role it is a minimal one,"

he said. "So I don't think the deaths of the sons of the former president will affect the resistance, nor even the death of Saddam himself."

Uday and Qusay were not noticeably close in life, but they went down fighting side by side in the violent tradition of their clan. Barricading themselves into the villa, they resisted US troops for several sweltering hours.

Two other bodies removed from the villa were a grandson of Saddam and an aide of Uday, a US official said.

Their deaths will be a boost to Bush. He has been under pressure over mounting US casualties and the failure to find any of the chemical, biological or nuclear weapons he used to justify war despite widespread international opposition.

Bush himself welcomed their deaths as "positive news."

His closest Iraq war ally, British Prime Minister Tony Blair who is also under heavy fire over the conflict, said the deaths marked a "great day for the new Iraq."

Myanmar releases 91 opposition activists

REUTERS, Yangon

Myanmar has said it released 91 members of Aung San Suu Kyi's opposition party who were detained with her following a clash with pro-government supporters in late May, foreign diplomats said Wednesday. The National League for Democracy (NLD) members had been released over a three-week period starting on June 26, according to a government letter sent to foreign embassies on Tuesday. The letter made no mention of Suu Kyi, diplomats said.

Myanmar's military government is under intense international pressure to release Suu Kyi, who was detained on May 30 after a clash between her supporters and a pro-government group.



PHOTO: AFP

Residents surround a truck that fell into a ditch beside a highway in Manila at the height of typhoon Imbudo July 23. At least 17 people were reported killed and 11,000 others displaced following the strongest to hit the country since 1998.

Kashmir attacks won't derail peace process: India

IANS, Jammu

Union Defence Minister George Fernandes on Wednesday blamed Pakistan-based groups for the terrorist attacks in Jammu and Kashmir but maintained that these should not be allowed to derail the peace process between the two countries.

He also shot down war talk over the incidents.

Talking to newsmen after visiting the Tando camp where terrorists had killed an army brigadier and seven soldiers in twin attacks on Tuesday, Fernandes said that the fidayeen attacks were carried out by some agencies in Pakistan and the "whole world knows that there are many such camps".

He said that the Lashkar-e-Taiba was behind the attack, though it seeks to deceive the world by giving out front names of little known groups. This appears to be an attempt to derail the nascent peace process.

He, however, would not commit

himself to saying that they were working independent of the Pakistani government. "The Pakistani President says that they have given the necessary orders (to check terrorism)," he said.

Asked if he believed this, Fernandes replied: "This is a different matter".

He categorically stated that these incidents of violence should not be allowed to derail the peace process between India and Pakistan in recent months.

He also decried the tendency to talk in terms of a war with Pakistan over such incidents. "We are a big country and such incidents should not bring us to this level where it means something is going to happen instantly," Fernandes told a questioner who recalled how the May 2002 massacre of wives and children of soldiers at Kaluchak had brought India and Pakistan close to a war.

Fernandes denied that the two lieutenant generals were wounded in the attack, but he was contra-

dicted by the corps commander of 16 corps, Lt. Gen. TPS Brar, who admitted to the fact "we all received minor injuries".

The minister said that the minor injuries didn't mean the generals had been rendered out of action. They are very much in action, Fernandes said.

Earlier, Fernandes visited the Tando camp and the military hospital to inquire about the injured soldiers. He also held a security review meeting with the Army Chief Gen NC Vij and Lt Gen Hari Prasad, general officer commanding-in-chief northern command, who had received splinter injuries in the attack on Tuesday afternoon.

Fernandes, who reviewed the security situation here with the top commanders, evaded a direct answer to a question whether the attacks called for setting up of a unified security command in Jammu and Kashmir to intensify the counter-insurgency operations.

BBC has Kelly's 'concerns over WMD' on tape

BBC ONLINE

The BBC has a tape of scientist Dr David Kelly expressing concern about the way Iraq weapons intelligence was presented, it has emerged.

The science editor of Newsnight, Susan Watts, recorded her conversation with Dr Kelly, according to the BBC's media correspondent Torin Douglas.

The BBC is expected to submit the tape as part of its evidence to the judicial inquiry led by Lord Hutton into Dr Kelly's death.

The BBC will not discuss the content of the tape, but is thought to regard it as a useful part of its evidence, rather than the centrepiece.

Dr Kelly was found dead in woods near his Oxfordshire home last Friday.

The weapons expert apparently killed himself after coming under intense scrutiny following BBC reports that Iraqi weapons intelligence had been exaggerated by the government.

After his death, the BBC confirmed Dr Kelly had been the source for three journalists who

had reported concern among the intelligence community.

On Newsnight on 2 and 4 June, Ms Watts had quoted an unnamed source at length, as saying the government was "obsessed with finding intelligence on immediate Iraqi threats".

The source was reported as questioning the claim that Iraq could launch weapons of mass destruction within 45 minutes.

"It was a statement that was made and it just got out of all proportion," the source said.

"They were desperate for information, they were pushing hard for information which could be released. That was one that popped up and it was seized on and it's unfortunate that it was."

"That's why there is the argument between the intelligence services and the Cabinet Office/No 10 - because they picked up on it and once they've picked up on it, you can't pull it back from them."

The Guardian newspaper says the tape's existence explains the corporation's determination to stick by its story, under the onslaught of criticism from government figures.

Bush aide takes partial blame for speech

AFP, Washington

A senior White House aide accepted part of the blame for a statement in a speech by President George W. Bush that administration officials said should not have been made.

"This is a situation where a number of people had an opportunity to avoid the problem. And those opportunities were not taken advantage of," deputy national security adviser Stephen Hadley said.

"And what we needed to make clear today is that based on what we now know, we had opportunities here to avoid this problem. We didn't take them."

Bush has drawn fire over a line

in his January State of the Union address to the nation alleging that the British had learned Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein sought uranium in Africa. White House aides have publicly said he should not have said it.

Central Intelligence Agency director George Tenet earlier this month publicly accepted the blame for leaving the line in the speech even though his agency had repudiated it.

But he later said the White House pushed for its inclusion, according to one lawmaker who heard his closed-door testimony last week.

Hadley disclosed that the White House deleted a reference to Saddam's efforts to get uranium from an October speech by Bush

after receiving two CIA memoranda casting doubt on the assertion.

"Given the October 5 and 6 CIA memorandum, and my telephone conversation with ... Tenet at roughly the same time, I should have recalled at the time of the State of the Union speech that there was controversy associated with the uranium issue," Hadley said.

British Prime Minister Tony Blair continues to insist the information is genuine and not based on documents later determined to have been forged. But Democrats have seized on the mistake, claiming it is evidence the White House exaggerated and manipulated evidence to push the nation into war.



PHOTO: AFP

Afghan girl Sheela, 8, carries plastic containers as she heads to a water pump built by the United Nation on the outskirts of Kabul. With most of the country's infrastructure destroyed by years of conflicts, only 5 percent of rural households have access to safe water while most provinces have no public services.

Palestinians blast Israeli refusal to release Jihad, Hamas prisoners

AFP, Jerusalem

The Palestinians warned the peace process could come to a dead-end because of Israeli decision to keep any members of the hardline Hamas and Islamic Jihad behind bars.

The commission gave the green light to the release of 350 Palestinians who had been on a list drawn up by the Israeli domestic intelligence service Shin Beth, public radio reported.

But the commission also decided that the government should review a dossier which included 100 other detainees "belonging to terrorist organisations" that the government had suggested be freed, army radio added.

Israel regards groups such as Hamas and Islamic Jihad as terrorist organisations. Both agreed on June 29 to a three-month halt to anti-Israeli attacks but a raft of conditions was attached to the truce, including the release of all the estimated 6,000 Palestinians in Israeli prisons.

It had been expected that the commission, which was chaired by Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, would wave through the list of 450 names,

including members of Hamas and Islamic Jihad who were not implicated in attacks which led to Israeli casualties.

The Palestinian minister for prisoners' affairs said Wednesday that Israel's refusal to release Hamas and Islamic Jihad prisoners would "lead the political process to a dead-end."

"We have entered a huge political crisis with the Israeli side and this decision will lead the political process to a dead-end," Hisham Abdelrazaq told AFP.

The prisoners issue has become one of the major sticking points between the two sides with the Palestinians growing increasingly frustrated by Israel's refusal not to release more detainees.

Palestinian prime minister Mahmud Abbas, who has faced heavy internal criticism over his failure to persuade the Israelis to give more ground, is due to hold talks with US President George W. Bush in Washington on Friday.

Speaking before news emerged of the outcome of the ministerial commission, Palestinian information minister Nabil Amr appeared to soften demands that all 6,000 prisoners be freed.

"The Palestinians require a

huge number of our prisoners to be released but not according to Israeli classifications," he told reporters.

Amr said that the Palestinians would look to the US to exert pressure on Israel over the prisoners issue.

"If there is no progress in this important visit to Washington we can be sure that Prime Minister Mahmud Abbas will face a tough situation among the Palestinian people and the Legislative Council (the Palestinian parliament)," he added.

"He (Abbas) will have to inform the Legislative Council of his achievements on the political level but until now we don't have significant results to convince (the parliament) that we have succeeded in our mission."

Abbas is spearheading the Palestinians' talks in the peace process after the US and Israel both refused to deal with Palestinian Authority president Yasser Arafat, whom they accuse of trying to undermine his prime minister.

"The Palestinians require a

US Secret Service told to leave pro-Bush cartoonist alone

AFP, Washington

Pulitzer Prize winning cartoonist Michael Ramirez could breathe a sigh of relief Wednesday, after a powerful lawmaker rushed to rescue him from the US Secret Service, which unexpectedly took a keen interest in one of his latest drawings.

Then again, there is no way of knowing how conservative Republican Congressman Christopher Cox would have reacted had he not found the cartoon in question generally supportive of President George W. Bush.

The drawing that appeared in The Los Angeles Times on Sunday was fashioned after a world-famous Vietnam War-era photograph showing South Vietnamese General Nguyen Ngoc Loan shooting a Vietcong prisoner at point-blank range.

In the cartoon, the executioner had the word "politics" written across his back, while a humbly-looking Bush took the place of the prisoner staring into the barrel of a handgun.

The backdrop was a bombed-out Arab city labeled "Iraq."