

## Iran admits holding key al-Qaeda members

AP, Tehran

Iran announced Wednesday it was holding senior members of the al-Qaeda terror network and will hunt down any others on its soil, while the United States demanded it turn over any prisoners to face justice.

Tehran's announcement came just days after President Bush accused it of harboring terrorists. Iran's government has long said al-Qaeda operatives are in its prisons, but this was the first word that some prisoners held high positions in Osama bin Laden's terror network - blamed for the Sept. 11 attacks and for suicide bombings this year at Western housing complexes in the Saudi capital, Riyadh.

"A large number of small- and big-time elements of al-Qaeda are in our custody," Intelligence Minister Ali Yunesi told reporters.

## 'Iraqi-Americans a vital intelligence source for US forces in Iraq'

AFP, Washington

Iraqi nationals living in the United States have been a source of vital intelligence for US troops seeking to root out remnants of deposed dictator Saddam Hussein's regime, FBI director Robert Mueller told a congressional panel Wednesday.

"We had in excess of 200 reports that were funneled to our troops overseas about the location of bunkers, weapons, communications facilities," Mueller said, noting that all told, about 10,000 Iraqi-Americans across the United States were interviewed by US federal agencies before the start of the US-led war in Iraq.

The interviews went exceptionally well," Mueller told the Senate Judiciary Committee.

## Thousands evacuated as typhoon bears down in China

AFP, Beijing

Thousands of people have been evacuated, and water supplies and electricity cut as powerful winds whipped southern China ahead of the expected landfall later Thursday of deadly Typhoon Imbudo.

"The typhoon has already started to affect the city. We have evacuated thousands of people from danger areas. Tree have already been uprooted," Chen Feichang from the Yangjiang city civil affairs bureau told AFP by telephone.

## Ousted Sao Tome leader returns home after deal

AFP, Libreville

The deposed president of Sao Tome and Principe, Fradique de Menezes, returned home Wednesday under a deal to end a seven-day-old military takeover that allows him to return to office and grants amnesty to the coup leaders.

Hours later, the parliament unanimously approved the amnesty for those responsible for the July 16 bloodless coup in the tiny west African nation.

De Menezes flew in from the Gabonese capital, Libreville, earlier on Wednesday, accompanied by Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo, after an agreement was reached to restore constitutional order to the potentially oil-rich but impoverished islands.

## Liberians flee 'senseless' bombardment

AFP, Monrovia

Thousands of civilians carrying bundles of belongings fled Monrovia in the driving rain Wednesday as troops loyal to President Charles Taylor pushed toward the northeast of the city where rebel forces sought to capture a strategic bridge.

Little over a mile (two kilometers) from the front, government militiamen waited anxiously to be sent forward as the rebels pounded government positions near the Stockton Creek bridge area.

Defense Minister Daniel Chea said the rebels were using 81mm mortars, a relatively heavy weapon.

"The fighting is very heavy here," said the government commander, General Roland Duo, in a weary voice as shells crashed behind him near the bridge. Government trucks swerved as a shell fell into a rice field at the side of the road.

# Pentagon announces major US troop rotations in Iraq

REUTERS, AFP, Washington

The Pentagon, recognising the pressures on troops who are now serving in Iraq as peacekeepers after fighting a war, announced Wednesday a major program of troop rotations.

The program unveils plans for troop rotations stretching forward to April 2004.

The Pentagon will replace weary military personnel in Iraq with fresh American and international troops in the coming months, with most US soldiers facing yearlong deployments.

The long-awaited troop-rotation plan for the postwar stabilization force in Iraq features the first-ever deployment of a new Army brigade built around the high-tech "Stryker" armored

vehicle, and also calls for activating thousands more Army National Guard soldiers.

The Army's 3rd Infantry Division (Mechanized) will be sent home in September and replaced by elements of the 82nd Airborne Division, acting Army Chief of Staff Gen. Jack Keane told a Pentagon briefing.

The 3rd Infantry Division spearheaded the invasion of Iraq, was the first unit to enter Baghdad and now shoulders a heavy burden in the postwar effort. Forty-one US troops have been killed in hostile fire in Iraq since May 1, when President Bush declared major combat operations over.

The Stryker Brigade, which has undergone field trials but has not seen action, is due to deploy to Iraq in October, replacing the 3rd

Armored Cavalry Regiment, Keane said.

"We have put them through their paces and they are ready to go," Keane said.

The brigade, based at Fort Lewis, Washington, is built around new class of light armored vehicles. The "Stryker" is a speedy, wheeled armored vehicle that combines firepower and agility, with reduced support requirements, according to the Army.

The Pentagon has been under pressure to produce a firm plan for getting fresh troops to Iraq.

Since May 1, US troops have faced regular attacks from a resistance described as growing more organized and sophisticated. Some 3rd Infantry Division soldiers have complained about the uncertainty of when they will

return home.

The 1.4 million-member US military has been stretched since the September 2001 attacks on America by deployments in Afghanistan and Iraq along with commitments to what Bush calls the US war on terrorism.

There are 144,000 US troops in Iraq, including 133,300 Army soldiers, and another 12,400 from Britain and other countries.

"The force is stressing hard to meet its challenges. Is it overstressed? Can it not meet its challenges? We don't have any indication of that at this point," said Maj. Gen. Stanley McChrystal, vice director for operations for the military's Joint Staff.

## Informant under US guard with bounty for Saddam's sons

AFP, Baghdad

The man whose tip-off led to the deaths of Saddam Hussein's sons was Wednesday under American protection, apparently with a 30-million-dollar bounty under his belt, the US military said. Colonel Joe Anderson said the informant was under protection but declined to confirm local suspicions that he was tribal chief Nawaf Mohammed al-Zaidan, owner of the mansion where Uday and Qusay Hussein made their last desperate stand.

"He is in US custody. We're protecting him," the colonel told AFP.

Anderson added that he thought the informant had received the 15-million-dollar bounties placed on the heads of each of Saddam's two sons by the US overseer in Iraq, Paul Bremer.

A neighbour of Zaidan told AFP he witnessed Tuesday's operation, which started with US soldiers knocking on the door and ended several hours later with missiles crashing into the building, killing the four defenders inside.

## Intervention force arrives in Solomons

AFP, Henderson Field

The first of more than 2,000 troops from an Australian-led intervention force landed in the troubled Solomon Islands Thursday to start the biggest military operation in the Pacific since World War II.

Some of the troops -- here to restore law and order -- took defensive positions immediately after they arrived, and by late afternoon the first joint Australian-Solomon Islands police patrol had been mounted in the capital Honiara.

The first C130 Hercules aircraft touched down in the war-ravaged nation just after 7:00 am (2000 GMT) at the World War II Henderson Field and quickly off-loaded a squad of soldiers.

## US bows to UK, Australia on military trials

REUTERS, Washington

Bowing to pressure from two key allies in the US-declared war on terrorism, the Pentagon said on Wednesday it would not seek the death penalty in any military trials held for two British subjects or an Australian national held at Guantanamo Bay.

The announcement followed the opening of separate talks this week between the Defence Department's top legal officer and representatives of Britain and Australia, which have complained of legal restrictions in such trials and a possible death penalty for conviction of major crimes.

President Bush on July 3 designated six foreign captives eligible to be tried before US military commissions. While none was named, two have been reported to be British and one Australian.

"Among other things, the US assured the UK that the prosecution had reviewed the evidence against Feroz Abbasi and Moazzam Begg, and that based on the evidence, if charged, the prosecution would not seek the death penalty in either case," a Pentagon statement said on Wednesday.

"Additionally, the circumstances of their cases are such that they would not warrant monitoring of conversations between them and their defense counsels," it added.



PHOTO: AFP

Iraqis look inside the burned out vehicle in which two Iraqis died after US troops opened fire on them when they refused to stop at a military checkpoint in Baghdad on Thursday. The car burst into flames but it was not clear if the intense fire by US troops was the result of the ignition of the gasoline or of explosives carried inside the car.

# Palestinians urge US to prod Israel on prisoners

## Abbas begins Washington visit

AFP, Gaza City

Palestinians called for the United States to use its influence to persuade Israel to release more of their prisoners as prime minister Mahmud Abbas began a landmark trip to Washington Thursday.

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Abbas' arrival in Washington came as Israeli Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom was also fending off US criticism over the building of a controversial security fence

between Israel and the West Bank. "A misunderstanding is developing with the Americans on this fence because of ignorance of the specifics of this project," Shalom told Israeli military radio from Washington, after talks with US Secretary of State Colin Powell.

The meeting was designed to prepare the July 29 talks between Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and US President George W. Bush.

"The Palestinians have launched an extensive opinion campaign against this fence to make believe it will harm their interests, create facts on the ground and will risk torpedoing the peace process," Shalom said.

"Quite the contrary, this fence is aimed at preventing terrorist attacks and attempts to torpedo the peace process," he added.

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# North Korea insists it is trying to prevent war

AFP, Beijing

North Korea has insisted it is doing all it can to prevent war on the Korean peninsula, but said it was ready to fight to the death if there were a conflict, official Chinese media reported Thursday.

"The DPRK (North Korea) has made unremitting efforts to prevent the outbreak of war and safeguard peace on the Korean peninsula," said Yang Hyong Sop, vice-president of North Korea's Presidium of the Supreme People's Assembly.

"But the United States has turned down the DPRK proposal for signing a non-aggression treaty."

Yang made the remarks at the opening ceremony of the International Conference for Peace on the Korean peninsula in

Pyongyang, China's Xinhua news agency reported from the North Korean capital.

Delegates from dozens of countries and international organizations are attending the three-day meeting, Xinhua said.

Yang was quoted as saying participants "will discuss issues with a view to fundamentally removing the dangerous war crisis on the Korean peninsula caused by the US provocative moves".

"The DPRK has continuously faced military threat and great obstacles to economic development from the United States since the Korean War ended 50 years ago," he said.

Yang stressed that "the peace-loving DPRK army and people will fight to the end in defending the national dignity", Xinhua said.

## City councilor, gunman killed at NY City Hall

AP, New York

An aspiring politician strolled past a metal detector at tightly guarded City Hall - escorted by the councilman he once hoped to replace - then pulled a gun in the crowded balcony of the council chamber and shot his rival to death.

The attack Wednesday turned New York City's seat of government into a crime scene, with screaming political aides and terrified visitors diving for cover. A security officer fired up at the gunman, killing him with five bullets.

Councilman James Davis, 41, a former police officer and ordained minister who campaigned against urban violence, was struck several times in the torso and died at a hospital. He had planned to introduce legislation on workplace violence that afternoon.

## Opposition against sending Japanese troops to Iraq

AFP, Tokyo

Japanese opposition parties on Thursday launched eleventh-hour resistance to enacting a bill to send troops to Iraq, submitting a censure motion against the foreign minister.

Four opposition groups in the upper house of parliament submitted the non-binding motion against Foreign Minister Yoriko Kawaguchi in a bid to delay debate on the bill as the current session ends on Monday.

The bill, already approved by the powerful lower house in June, would provide the legal basis for what will be the first dispatch of Japanese troops since World War II to a country where fighting is still going on.

The ruling coalition, which enjoys a comfortable majority in the upper house, is expected to vote down the motion although the opposition camp also plans to present censure motions against Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi and other ministers.

The doomed motions are likely to put off the start of debate of the bill by the Foreign Affairs and Defence Committee, whose approval is a prerequisite for voting on it at an upper house plenary session.

The ruling coalition planned to enact it on Friday but there was speculation it could be delayed until Saturday or Sunday.

# CIA, FBI blamed in Sept 11 congressional report

REUTERS, Washington

A congressional report on Thursday will detail Sept. 11 intelligence failures by the FBI and CIA, but does not pinpoint a "smoking gun" that could have prevented the hijacked plane attacks.

But Sen. Bob Graham, who chaired the intelligence committee during last year's inquiry, said without the problems and with some luck, the attacks could have been prevented.

"There were enough gaffes, turf protections and lack of the standard of professionalism that we would expect of intelligence agencies," the Florida Democrat said on CNN's "Larry King Live" on Wednesday.

"If those had been eliminated plus some luck ... we could have found out about the plotters and disrupted the plot before they struck us," Graham, who is running for president, said.

The final 900-page report will include newly declassified details, but the findings of the joint inquiry of the House and Senate intelligence committees were released

last December and much of the information has already been made public.

A section on whether there was any Saudi support for the hijackers will remain classified, government sources said.

The report details the contacts of an FBI informant with two of the Sept. 11 hijackers, Khalid al-Mihdhar and Nawaf al-Hazmi, while they were living in rooms rented to them by the informant in San Diego.

The investigation raised suspicions but reached no definite conclusion about whether Omar Al-Bayoumi, a Saudi who knew the two hijackers while living in San Diego, was connected to the Saudi government, the sources said.

Prince Bandar bin Sultan, the Saudi ambassador to the United States, said in a statement on Wednesday the issue had been investigated by the United States and Britain and dismissed. Suggestions that Al-Bayoumi was an agent of the Saudi government "are baseless and not true," he said.

The congressional inquiry

found the FBI and CIA missed opportunities to track or share information that could have shed light on the Sept. 11 plot, but there was no single clue overlooked that could have prevented the attacks, according to the government sources.

"It points to a possibility of how we might have been able to get to the plot quicker," one source said, but there was no "smoking gun."

One of the missed clues included the "Phoenix clues" which an FBI agent in Phoenix, Arizona sent to headquarters, expressing concerns that al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden was sending students to the United States for flight training. The memo generated little interest, the joint inquiry said.

The CIA was criticized for squandering opportunities to act on information that al-Mihdhar and al-Hazmi, who were associated with bin Laden, were traveling to the United States and to add their names to US government watch lists.



PHOTO: AFP

The first troops of the Australian-led intervention force based aboard the HMAS Manoora come ashore at Red Beach landing site near Honiara in the Solomon Islands on Thursday. Over 2,000 troops and police from Australia, New Zealand, Fiji, Papua New Guinea and Tonga are expected to take part in operation to restore law and order to the deeply troubled South Pacific nation.

# Arab press warns Iraqi resistance will go on

AFP, Dubai

There were no regrets in Thursday's Arab press over the death of Saddam Hussein's notorious sons, but newspapers doubted that the killing of Uday and Qusay by US forces would ease anti-US resistance in Iraq.

"Those defending Iraq are unknown people whose statues are not erected on the streets and whose activities do not hinge on the presence or otherwise of Saddam, Uday, Qusay and all the clique that ruled the country with iron and fire," wrote Saudi Arabia's Al-Watan.

Resistance "will continue in various forms so long as the Tigris and Euphrates rivers flow," the daily said.

Like their father, Uday and Qusay had become irrelevant to Iraqis the moment Baghdad fell to US forces on April 9, "because the capital which they abandoned after plundering its riches, can defend itself without them," Al-Watan added.

Al-Yaum, another Saudi daily, said even Saddam's capture by the US-led coalition would not stem attacks on coalition forces so long as basic services were not restored.

Al-Jazirah, also Saudi, said Iraqi resistance fighters did "not want to have anything to do with Saddam," while Al-Nadwa expressed the

hope that the killing of his two sons in a US raid in northern Iraq Tuesday would speed up US moves to hand over power to the Iraqis.

Also in Saudi Arabia, the English-language Arab News called the pair's death a "victory" for both the Americans and the Iraqi people, but cautioned it would not end the ongoing violence.

"That Uday and Qusay Hussein are dead is a victory for the Americans and, far more important, a victory for the Iraqi people. Both needed the break," the paper wrote.

But "by concentrating all their efforts on Saddam and the Baathists ... the Americans may well be ignoring other sources of resistance, other sources of violence in Iraq," it said.

"The disparate groups that make up the country are ... clamoring to make their voices heard. Perhaps the resistance is rather a violent medley of messages, to the ordinary Iraqis as much as to the Americans, that these different groups exist and are a force to be reckoned with."

In the United Arab Emirates, the daily Akhbar Al-Arab said resistance to occupation is never a function of a single individual.

In Iraq's case, "the absence of Saddam and his two sons from the scene might in fact encourage

Iraqis who dream of an Iraq free of both Saddam and the Americans to join the ranks of the resistance," the paper said.

Qatar's Al-Watan said that if the deaths of Uday and Qusay helped anyone, it was the Americans and their British allies rather than the Iraqi people.

Washington and London are trying to snatch a PR victory "from something that was bound to happen sooner or later" in a bid to resolve the political problems plaguing them over the legitimacy of their war on Iraq, the paper said.

Fellow Qatari Al-Raya agreed, saying the US administration was trying to exploit the killing of the two brothers to ease the crisis it is facing for having manipulated intelligence regarding Iraq's alleged weapons of mass destruction.

The Jordanian press for its part said the two should have been captured and sent for trial instead of being killed.

Under a headline, "Reconciliation, Not Blood", the English-language Jordan Times, said, "True, the two Iraqis were on 'the most wanted list' and their elimination may have brought the US closer to its declared objective of canceling any remnants of the former Baath regime, but ending their lives will not, by itself, restore law and order to Iraq."