

Laloo Yadav to lead goodwill mission to Assam

PTI, Putna

India's RJD chief Laloo Prasad Yadav will lead a goodwill mission of parliamentarians to Assam shortly. This follows last week's anti-Assamese violence in Bihar.

"Bihar has had extremely cordial relations not only with Assam but also with other states of the region," he said. "I will take a delegation of MPs to ease tension between the two old friends."

Though Laloo had not chalked out the itinerary, he confirmed his visit to Assam Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi on Monday. Laloo also assured adequate security to all passengers from the Northeast during their train journey through Bihar.

Laloo has already acceded to the Assam government's request for a CBI probe. Assam had sought either a CBI probe or a judicial inquiry into the incidents "in view of the hurt sentiments of the Assamese".

US redoubling efforts to find Laden

REUTERS, Washington

Two years after President Bush said Osama bin Laden was wanted dead or alive, America's new Afghan envoy said on Tuesday the United States is redoubling efforts to find him and other leaders of both al Qaeda and the Taliban.

The new US ambassador, Zalmay Khalilzad, an Afghan-born diplomat who is to be sworn in on Monday and depart for Kabul on Tuesday, said more help is needed from Afghan citizens particularly along border regions of Pakistan that the elusive bin Laden and top aides might be crossing into.

"We're going to redouble our efforts," Khalilzad told a group of reporters. With new funding for Afghanistan approved by Congress, the United States plans to "take the fight to the Taliban extremists and to go after the al Qaeda leadership," he said.

The Arabic television station Al Jazeera a month ago broadcast two audio tapes purportedly from bin Laden that vowed more suicide attacks inside and outside the United States and warning that all countries backing Washington over Iraq were targets.

Palestinian policeman arrested over killing of Israeli soldiers

AFP, Bethlehem

The Palestinian Authority has arrested a Palestinian policeman accused of carrying out a shooting attack in the West Bank on Tuesday which left two Israeli soldiers dead, a Palestinian security source said.

Jabr al-Akhras, who was originally from Gaza, was arrested overnight in the Bethlehem area, the source told AFP on Wednesday.

"He has admitted carrying out the attack," the source added.

The two soldiers were killed early Tuesday after a single gunman opened fire with a Kalashnikov assault rifle at a major military barrier along the so-called "tunnel road" which links Jerusalem to the southern West Bank.

The gunman approached the barrier carrying a prayer mat in which he had concealed his weapon, Israeli military sources said. After shooting the pair, he then fled by foot but the Israelis believe he then jumped into a waiting car.

Turkey names synagogue bombers

AFP, Istanbul

The two assailants who detonated car bombs outside Istanbul synagogues, killing themselves and 23 others, have been identified as two Turkish men in their 20s who might have been linked to the al-Qaeda network, the city's governor said on Wednesday.

Police established that the two suicide bombers who detonated huge bombs while driving past the Neve Shalom and Beth Israel synagogues during Sabbath prayers on Saturday were respectively Gokhan Elaltuntas, 22, and Mesut Cabuk, 29. Governor Muammer Guler told a televised press conference.

"Taking into account the target, the way the attacks were perpetrated and the contacts of the assailants, we assess that the attacks parallel terrorist acts across the world claimed by al-Qaeda. Security force continue to work on this," he said.

The governor said both bombers were from the mainly Kurdish south-eastern city of Bingol, where underground Islamist groups have been active in the past several years.

13 Biharis killed in Assam violence

Army deployed as mobs go on rampage

REUTERS, PTI, Guwahati

Indian army troops patrolled parts of the northeastern state of Assam on Wednesday after eight people were killed as rampaging mobs burned the homes of hundreds of settlers from the eastern state of Bihar.

Several local organisations, among them a key separatist guerrilla group, gave migrants from neighboring Bihar a deadline of seven days within which to leave Assam, as a dispute triggered by competition for jobs flared into violence.

"You can say many parts of Assam are on fire," said a senior police officer who declined to be identified.

Four women and two children belonging to one family were hacked to death and their home set alight in the town of Dibrugarh, about 250 km (155 miles) from Guwahati, a key city in the oil- and tea-rich state of Assam, a police spokesman said.

About 10-15 persons, armed with

knives, stormed into the house of Uma Kant Tewari, a small businessman, at Kheronipathar under Tingkhong police station and hacked to death his wife, two minor daughters, a son, a niece, and a nephew, police said.

The assailants set the house on fire before escaping, police said, adding, Tewari managed to escape unhurt.

Thousands of people sought shelter in police stations across Assam, which is also torn by a 25-year-old insurgency, as crowds targeted Biharis, setting fire to their homes built of wood and roofed with tin.

The mobs looted houses, assaulted the people living in them and then set them on fire using petrol and kerosene.

Police also discovered two unidentified bodies wounded with sharp objects on the streets of the eastern town of Tinsukia early on Wednesday. Soldiers patrolled Tinsukia and Dibrugarh, the two districts worst affected, in a bid to restore calm.

In neighbouring Tinsukia district, two bodies of Hindi-speaking people were recovered from Tinsukia town while another was killed at Makum when miscreants set ablaze a liquor bottling plant on Tuesday.

In another incident on Tuesday night, two armed ULFA militants came on a motor-cycle to a highway dhaba at Baxirhat under lower Assam's Dhubri district and opened indiscriminate fire on truck drivers killing four Bihar truck drivers and injuring seven.

Reports were also pouring in about clusters of huts belonging to Biharis in different parts of the state being torched, their shops looted, physically assaulted and petty amounts of money extorted from them.

In the busy commercial town of Tinsukia, a large group of angry Bihari people pelted stones on the students of Senairam Higher Secondary School on Tuesday leading to a clash between the mob and the students.

Iran offers political aid to Iraqi Governing Council

AFP, Tehran

Iran has offered Iraq a package of political and security assistance, after a landmark visit here by top members of the Iraqi Governing Council that also yielded a trade pact set to boost Iranian economic clout in its US-occupied neighbour.

Iranian state media said Iran's Interior Minister Abdolvahed Mussavi-Lari had offered top Kurdish leader Jalal Talabani, the current chair of the US-appointed Iraqi body, assistance in matters ranging from border security to drafting a new constitution.

"Now the black dictatorship of Saddam Hussein is over... the two nations can build mutual, regional and international trust," Mussavi-Lari told Talabani, who is heading a top delega-

tion on a two-day visit to Tehran.

"Iran can and is ready to share with you our experience in the fields of border security, the training and structuring of a police force, economic ties between border provinces, management of pilgrims, running city halls, issuing birth certificates and organising a census," he said.

"Since we have organised 23 elections we are ready to share our experiences in the framework of drafting a constitution, setting up an assembly and setting up polling stations," he added.

The reports did not say if Talabani, who also heads the powerful Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) and has at times enjoyed close ties with Iran but is now seen as being close to the United

States, gave any detailed response to the each of the offers.

But the BBC said on its website Talabani had told it Iran had agreed to help fight "terrorism" in Iraq, and had accepted that the current wave of attacks against US-led forces was not resistance to occupation but "the work of indiscriminate killers."

Iraq's interim Foreign Minister, Hoshyar Zebari, said Iran had agreed to help tighten control along the long border between the two countries and try to prevent infiltration, according to the BBC.

During the Iraqi visit, Iranian President Mohammad Khatami for the first time Monday expressly recognised the US-backed interim Governing Council after meeting with Talabani.

Nepal to seek India's help against Maoists

AFP, Kathmandu

Nepal's Prime Minister Surya Bahadur Thapa will visit India next week to seek further military assistance to combat a Maoist insurgency, officials and sources said yesterday.

He will also visit Sri Lanka and Bhutan in his capacity as the outgoing chairman of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), officials said.

"Prime Minister Thapa will be seeking India's cooperation in controlling the Maoists crossing over to Nepal from India as well as transportation of arms and ammunition," a foreign ministry source said.

"Nepal is seeking more military assistance for combating the Maoist rebels," the source added.

India is Nepal's main military supplier and recently supplied two bullet-proof helicopters to help the

battle against the guerrillas.

The Maoist rebels have been fighting for a communist republic in Nepal since 1996 during which more than 8,200 people have been killed.

There has been a surge in violence since the rebels pulled out of a seven-month ceasefire and peace talks on August 27.

Thapa will also discuss with Vaipayee expanding Nepalese exports to its huge neighbour and further Indian economic assistance to develop Nepal's hydropower.

India recently agreed to build a billion dollar hydropower project in western Nepal.

Thapa will also hold meetings on proposed resolutions to be approved by the SAARC summit in Islamabad in early January, particularly on economic cooperation, the control of terrorism and drug trafficking.

Chandrika criticised in parliament

BBC ONLINE

The speaker of the Sri Lankan parliament says President Chandrika Kumaratunga acted illegally when she suspended parliament two weeks ago.

There was uproar among her supporters as he accused her of abusing power.

Although parliament reopened on Wednesday, there is no sign of a resolution of the country's constitutional crisis.

The president and Prime Minister Ranil Wickramasinghe are in deep dispute over peace talks with Tamil Tiger rebels.

The power struggle threatens the peace process and pledges of billions of dollars of foreign aid.

The parliamentary speaker - who belongs to the prime minister's party - said the suspension of parliament was an abuse aimed at paralysing one arm of government.

"I hope the prorogation will not be an

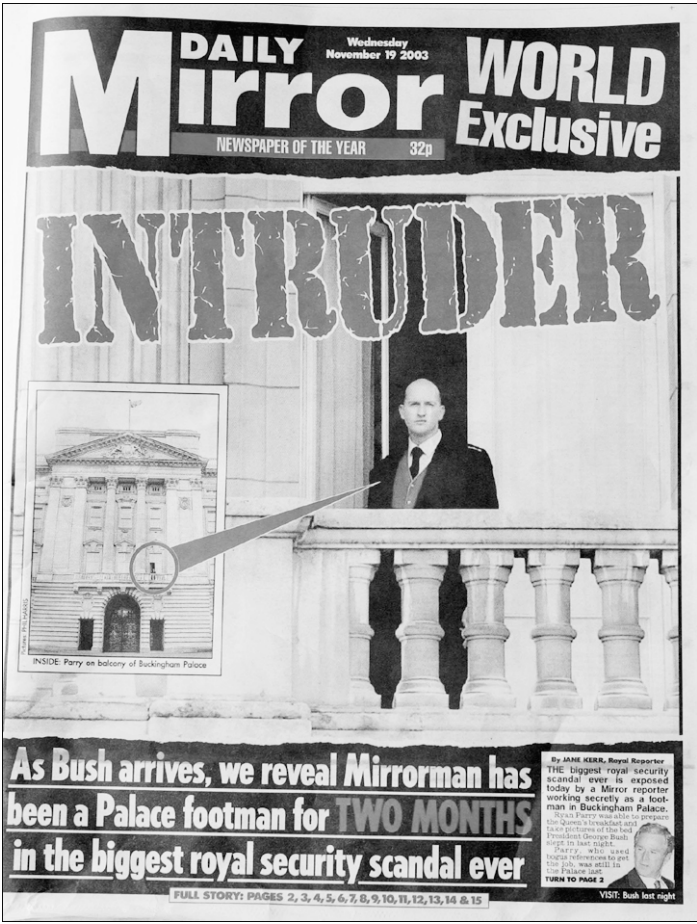


PHOTO: AFP
The front page of yesterday's Daily Mirror displays the story of how the Mirror was able to have a reporter working in Buckingham Palace in the two months leading up to the state visit of US President George W. Bush. Reporter Ryan Parry claimed that security was so lax he could easily have assassinated US President George W. Bush during his state visit to Britain.

1killed, six injured in battle near Kashmir army HQ

AFP, Srinagar

A policeman was killed and six security force members injured in a fierce gunbattle between Indian troops and Islamic militants near the army headquarters in Indian Kashmir, police said Wednesday.

The policeman was killed and three of his colleagues injured when rebels opened fire and hurled grenades Tuesday evening at a police base near the army headquarters in the summer capital Srinagar.

After a two-hour gunbattle, two rebels ran into a neighbouring building which troops and police sealed off, a police spokesman said.

Fighting resumed at dawn Wednesday, with rebels hurling grenades at besieging troops, injuring two army officers and another policeman, the spokesman said.

Iraq 90 percent normalised, says Bremer

AFP, Rome

Paul Bremer, the US civil administrator in Iraq, insisted in an interview published here Wednesday the situation in Iraq had been "normalised" in about 90 percent of the country, despite daily attacks on coalition forces.

"Around 90 percent of Iraq is calm, normalised, in peace," Bremer told the Corriere della Sera in the interview, published the day after Italy buried its 19 nationals killed in the bombing of its military base in southern Iraq, which also killed nine Iraqis.

Bremer said the Nasiriyah bombing

"was a red alert for everybody. No international contingent can have any illusions, nobody can feel immune to terrorism. Everyone has become a potential target."

He flatly rejected allegations by Italy's representative to his Coalition Provisional Council, Marco Calamai, who resigned this week in protest at the way the US-dominated council was running the country and called for the operation to be handed over to the United Nations.

"I really don't know what he's talking about," said Bremer.

"Calamai says that we don't know

how to manage the 400,000 dollars a month allocated to the Nasiriyah region. But I can show him that from last May until now we spent more than 20 million dollars in this area alone."

"He says we need the UN here? Well, we want them here too. But it was they who left Iraq, refusing our protection," added Bremer, a former US ambassador to the Netherlands who has headed the council since May.

"Two weeks ago in Madrid I met Kofi Annan and tried to convince him to return. Even if, I have to tell you, the UN is certainly not a model of efficiency, thrift and dynamism."



PHOTO: AFP
Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi (L) shakes hands with opposition Democratic Party of Japan leader Naoto Kan at the National Diet after Koizumi was re-elected as prime minister yesterday.

Sonia violated code of conduct: EC

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

The Indian Election Commission has found prima facie that the Leader of the Opposition Sonia Gandhi and one of her top aides had "violated" the model code of conduct for elections and issued a show cause notice to her party Congress asking it why its national party status should not be suspended or withdrawn.

The Commission headed by J M Lyngdoh in an order said Gandhi and Ajit Jogi, Chief Minister of Congress-ruled Chhattisgarh state, where elections to a new legislature is slated for December 1, had used the state government's aircraft during electioneering. It said one aircraft and a helicopter, owned by Chhattisgarh government, had been used by the Congress leaders on and after October 6 up to November 12 for as many as times for election campaign in "violation" of the code of conduct.

Chattisgarh as also three other Congress-governed states Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Delhi go to assembly polls. The Election Commission has

asked Congress party to reply within a week and said if no response was received within that time it would then take appropriate decision or action.

The Congress has denied that Sonia Gandhi had used government aircraft for electioneering and said it would reply to the Election Commission show cause notice. The Commission's findings about Sonia and Jogi has come as a slight dampener to Congress' glee following the resignation of senior BJP leader Dilip Singh Judeo as a Federal minister over charges of bribery against him.

Judeo hails from Chhattisgarh. Meanwhile, there were clear indications that the Judeo episode would be a major issue in the coming elections to the four states as the final phase of electioneering there began yesterday.

The episode figured in the speeches of the star campaigners of India's ruling BJP and main opposition Congress at separate rallies addressed by Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, Deputy Prime Minister L K Advani and Sonia Gandhi respectively.



PHOTO: AFP
Indian opposition leader and President of Congress Party Sonia Gandhi (L) talks with Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee as they meet at the presentation of the India Gandhi Prize for Peace, Disarmament and Development 2002 at The Presidential Palace in New Delhi yesterday.