

Reagan's body lies in state, thousands pay tribute

REUTERS, Washington

Thousands of Americans filed silently past Ronald Reagan's body at the US Capitol yesterday in an emotional outpouring of respect and affection for the 40th president of the United States.

A steady stream of viewers -- at least 2,000 an hour -- filed slowly past the flag-draped coffin in the Capitol Rotunda from Wednesday evening into the morning. Some waited up to seven hours in a line that snaked around the building on a hot, humid night.

"It's the first and only time I'm ever going to be able to be in his presence," Jeff Riley, 36, who said Reagan inspired him to join the Marine Corps, said on CNN early on Thursday. "This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity."

Reagan's coffin was to lie in state until Friday morning, when a funeral service will take place at the National Cathedral. Around 150,000 people were expected to file past the casket during those 34 hours.

After the funeral Reagan's body will be flown back to California one last time for a sunset burial on the grounds of his presidential library overlooking rolling desert hills just north of Los Angeles.



PHOTO: AFP

US President George W. Bush (2nd-R) strolls the beach with Russian President Vladimir Putin (C), Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi (2nd-L), German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder (L-obscured) and Italian President Silvio Berlusconi (R) during the Group of Eight Summit Wednesday on Sea Island in the southeastern coastal state of Georgia.

G8 harmony dissolves, US-France spats back

ME reform plan endorsed, Bush wants Nato role in Iraq

AFP, Sea Island

World leaders yesterday wrap up a G8 summit after a new era of trans-Atlantic unity dissolved in just one day into fresh US-France spats and squabbles over Iraq's 120 billion dollar debt pile.

The summit of Group of Eight industrialised nations had been billed as a chance to consign old animosity over the US invasion to history, after the West closed ranks to pass a new UN resolution on Iraq Tuesday.

But new diplomatic brushfires broke out almost immediately among the plush cottages of the top-scale Sea Island resort, even as US President George W. Bush led Iraq's new interim ruler onto the world stage.

Leaders of Britain, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Russia and the United States did manage to agree on Bush's controversial reform plan for the Islamic

world.

They also endorsed an end-of-July target for an outline deal on the most divisive issues in global trade talks, unveiled measures to halt transfers of nuclear technology and endorsed airline security improvements.

On Thursday, the G8 leaders met several counterparts from Africa, including South Africa's Thabo Mbeki and Senegal's Abdoulaye Wade, in a bid to head off claims they only pay lip service to the continent's woes.

Then Bush and other leaders held final press conferences. The US leader will go straight to Washington to pay his final respects to late former president Ronald Reagan, lying in state in the US Capitol.

Interim Iraqi president Sheikh Ghazi al-Yawar's first international bow at the swank private beach resort hosting the rich-nations summit was a world

removed from the violence of postwar Iraq.

"Mr President, I'd like to express to you the commitment of the Iraqi people to move towards democracy," he said at his first-ever meeting with Bush.

Bush replied: "I really never thought I'd be sitting next to an Iraqi president of a free country a year and half ago."

But just one day after France signed up to a US-sponsored resolution at the United Nations on Iraqi sovereignty, the fractious allies were at loggerheads again -- on a handful of issues.

They clashed on Nato's role in Iraq, after Bush called for a greater presence of the Western alliance in the occupation.

"We will work with our Nato friends to at least continue the role that now exists and hopefully expand it somewhat," Bush said after meeting top ally British Prime Minister Tony Blair.

Iraq needs US forces after June 30: Allawi

Shia gunmen seize Najaf police station: 4 killed

REUTERS, AP, Baghdad

Iraq will need American and other foreign troops to fight guerrillas even after a US-led occupation formally ends on June 30, interim Prime Minister Iyad Allawi said on Wednesday.

But Allawi said in line with a UN resolution adopted unanimously overnight, US-led troops would not act without the consent of his government and would be asked to leave as soon as Iraqi forces were able to cope with security.

"The resolution is very clear that once Iraq stands on its feet then we will ask the multinational forces to leave Iraq," Allawi told reporters. "The multinational forces will not act except with the full agreement of the Iraqi government."

Underlining the security challenges in Iraq, guerrillas killed 12 members of an Iraqi force entrusted by Washington with pacifying the city of Falluja, west of Baghdad, and saboteurs blew up a

northern oil pipeline.

Allawi, appointed prime minister by consensus by the now dissolved US-selected Iraqi Governing Council, said he did not regret having worked with the CIA and other intelligence agencies when he headed an exiled group trying to topple Saddam Hussein.

"We don't feel ashamed of having been in touch to liberate Iraq from the evil forces of Saddam," he said.

AP adds: Shia gunmen seized a police station yesterday in Najaf in the first outbreak of fighting since an agreement to end weeks of bloody clashes between US troops and militia forces. Four Iraqis were killed and 13 were injured, hospital and militia officials said.

Gunmen loyal to radical cleric Muqtada al-Sadr took control of the Ghari police station just 250 yards from the Imam Ali Shrine, witness Mohammed Hussein said. The station was looted and police cars were burned.

11 Chinese shot dead in Afghanistan

AFP, Kabul

Eleven Chinese construction workers were gunned down yesterday in a usually peaceful area of northeastern Afghanistan in one of the worst attacks against foreigners since the fall of the Taliban regime.

General Mohammed Daud, the military commander Kunduz, said one Afghan also died in the raid and four Chinese nationals were injured. A spokesman for Nato-led peacekeepers in the town said a total of 16 people were hurt.

Up to 20 armed men stormed the workers' compound south of Kunduz in the middle of the night and opened fire with automatic weapons, the Chinese embassy said, describing the raid as a "terrorist attack".

"The enemies of Afghanistan, Taliban and al-Qaeda" were responsible, said General Daud. He said the compound, which housed 90 workers, was attacked because it did not have security guards. However the Chinese news agency

Xinhua said security guards at the site fought back.

The killings came against a background of spiralling violence in Afghanistan -- dozens of suspected Taliban militants have been killed by US-led forces in the past week and aid workers have been ambushed and attacked as the country prepares for elections in September.

The Interior Ministry said the attackers were armed with PK machine guns and AK-47s, and travelled in two small vehicles, a Corolla and a station wagon. The compound was in Jalawgeer, a district some 36km south of Kunduz, spokesman Lutfullah Marshal told AFP.

The Chinese embassy said the victims were among 100 people working on the construction of a road for the China Railway Construction Shisiju Group Corporation. Many of the workers only arrived in Afghanistan in the past week.

'JI terror group targets Jakarta envoys'

AFP, Jakarta

The al-Qaeda-linked Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) terror group has switched tactics from bombings and is now targeting Western ambassadors in Indonesia for assassination, a newspaper reported Thursday.

The Wall Street Journal said British and Australian intelligence organisations have "specific and credible" information that a group of JI operatives, trained to carry out assassinations, has entered Indonesia in recent weeks.

It said the group arrived through East Kalimantan province from Mindanao in the southern Philippines.

The paper, which cited unidentified Western police, security officials and analysts, said the US, British and Australian ambassadors and senior officials from those embassies were the prime targets.

"There are also concerns about potential attacks on foreign business executives, particularly in the mining and energy industries, and on Indonesian public figures," the Journal said.

IRAQI PRISON ABUSE

Lawsuit filed against US contractors

REUTERS, Washington

Two US defence contractors were accused in a class-action suit on Wednesday of conspiring with US officials to torture and abuse prisoners in Iraq.

The suit, filed in San Diego, alleged San-Diego based Titan Corp. and CACI International of Arlington, Virginia, engaged in "heinous and illegal acts" to show they could get intelligence from detainees, and thereby obtain more government contracts.

Employees from both firms, which provided interrogation and translation services in Iraq, were named in a report on Iraqi prison abuse by US Army investigator Maj. Gen. Antonio Taguba.

"We believe that CACI and Titan engaged in a conspiracy to torture and abuse detainees and did so to make more money," said Philadelphia-based lawyer Susan

Burke who filed the suit along with New York-based Center for Constitutional Rights.

The two companies are accused of violating the Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organisations Act, an anti-conspiracy law originally enacted to target organized crime.

Titan spokesman Wil Williams called the lawsuit "frivolous" and said the company would aggressively defend itself against the charges. He said the Titan employee named in the Taguba report, Adel Nahkla, had since left the company.

CACI did not immediately respond to phone calls asking for comment.

The lawsuit charged that Stephen Stefanowicz and John Israel of CACI Inc. and Nahkla "directed and participated in illegal conduct" at the Abu Ghraib prison outside Baghdad.

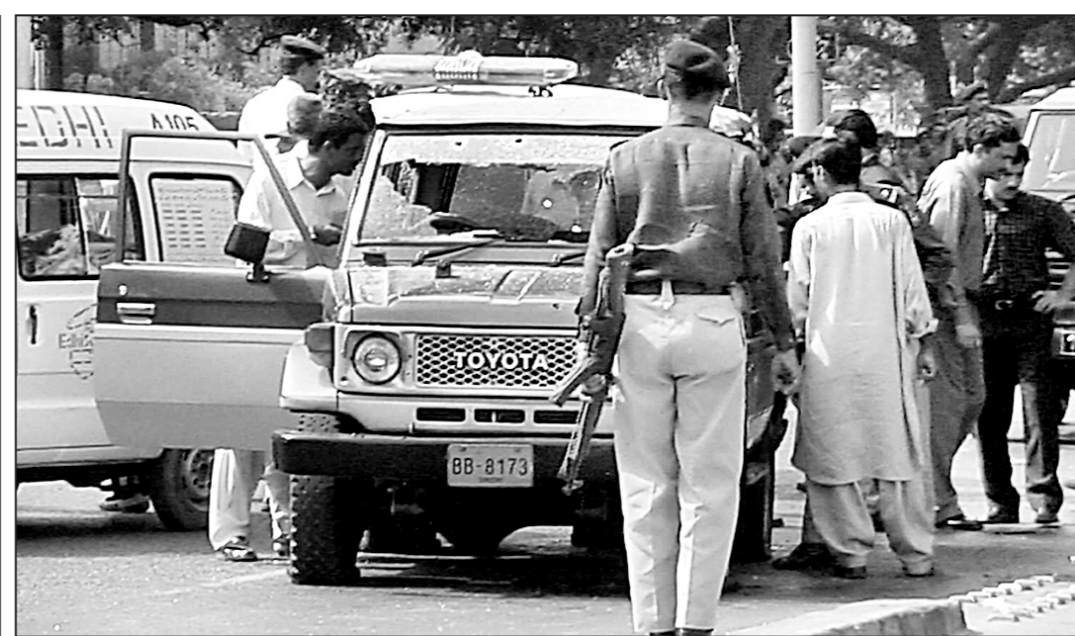


PHOTO: AFP

Pakistani policemen and pedestrians look at a damaged car after an alleged terrorist attack on a military motorcade in Karachi yesterday. At least 7 soldiers and 3 policemen were killed and four injured when gunmen opened fire on a motorcade of the local military commander in Pakistan's troubled city of Karachi.

Fighting rages in Taliban stronghold

AFP, Kabul

US-led forces have engaged in fierce fighting with insurgents that has left 70 suspected Taliban dead in the past week, as violence continues in the militia's former strongholds, officials said Wednesday.

"Since the beginning of the operation, around 70 people from enemy forces have been killed," southern Kandahar's military commander Khan Mohammed told AFP.

The US-led offensive, which involved marines on the ground supported by American warplanes, has seen six suspected Taliban arrested alive while five Afghan soldiers and six coalition troops have been injured, he said.

"Most of the people killed have died due to bombings in different mountainous areas," he said. "As we go into areas and secure them we find bodies laying here and there."

The commander said he was unsure of the number of militants injured or involved in the fighting, which was taking place in three or four valleys of the rugged mountains along the borders of southcentral Uruzgan, southeastern Zabul and Kandahar provinces.

Speaking of the bloodiest engagement which took place on Tuesday, a spokesman for the US-led coalition said: "In excess of 20 anti-coalition militants were killed."

Nuke confidence building with Pakistan is India's top priority: Natwar

AFP, New Delhi

India will give high priority to forging nuclear confidence-building measures with Pakistan during upcoming meetings, Foreign Minister Natwar Singh said yesterday.

"To me personally, the most important thing on our agenda should be the nuclear dimension because when we (Congress) remitted office in 1996 we (India) were not a nuclear power," Singh said.

The Press Trust of India news agency said Singh made the statement to a television channel when asked if the five-decade old dispute over Kashmir was one of the main issues between India and Pakistan.

The government of Hindu nationalist prime minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, conducted

nuclear tests in May 1998.

Pakistan responded a few days later with tests of its own. The two countries have refused to sign up to nuclear non-proliferation treaties because they are not formally recognised as nuclear powers.

They launched confidence-building measures and dialogue after a landmark agreement between Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf and Vajpayee in January to resolve all issues, including the festering Kashmir dispute.

The left-leaning Congress-led coalition, which defeated Vajpayee's coalition in the April/May elections, has pledged to continue with the peace process and announced that officials from the two sides would meet on June 19 and 20 in New Delhi for talks on nuclear confidence-building measures.

Iraqi missile engines found in Jordan: UN

REUTERS, United Nations

Engines for long-range missiles have turned up in Jordan from unguarded sites in Iraq that were once monitored for materials that could produce banned weapons, UN inspectors said Wednesday.

In a closed-door UN Security Council meeting, Demetrius Perricos, the acting director of the UN Monitoring, Verification and Inspections Commission, warned that too many pieces of equipment were leaving Iraq, some as scrap.

"We found a few more engines and a few other items in Jordan," Perricos told Reuters. "It is getting bad. Too many things are coming out."

UNMOVIC, using photographs and serial numbers, previously reported discovering SA-2 engines among scrap in the Dutch port city of Rotterdam. They were used in Iraq's Al Samoud 2 banned missile programme.

Bush policies created Iraq abuse: HR group

REUTERS, New York

Human Rights Watch on Wednesday accused the Bush administration of creating the climate for the Iraqi prison torture scandal when it "cast the rules aside" on prisoner interrogation techniques.

The New York-based watchdog said Washington circumvented international law and spent two years covering up or ignoring reports of torture or abuse by US troops in the war in Afghanistan and occupation of Iraq.

The US government has denied it had a policy to mistreat detainees in its war on terrorism.

"The horrors of Abu Ghraib were not simply the acts of individual soldiers," Human Rights Watch executive director Kenneth Roth said in a statement with the 38-page "The Road to Abu Ghraib" report.

"Abu Ghraib resulted from decisions made by the Bush administration to cast the rules aside."

Six US soldiers face possible courts-martial and one has already been sentenced to more than a year in prison for the torture revealed in April and made infamous by photographs, including naked detainees being forced to form a human pile in Abu Ghraib prison near Baghdad.

The rights group's report listed three ways in which it believed US policies had led to the abuse.

* After the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks, the administration "decided that the war on terrorism permitted the US to circumvent the restraints of international law," including the Geneva Conventions.

* The United States "employed coercive methods to inflict pain and humiliation on detainees to 'soften them up' for interrogation."

* Until the publication of the Abu Ghraib photographs, Bush administration officials "took at best a 'see no evil, hear no evil' approach to reports of detainee mistreatment."

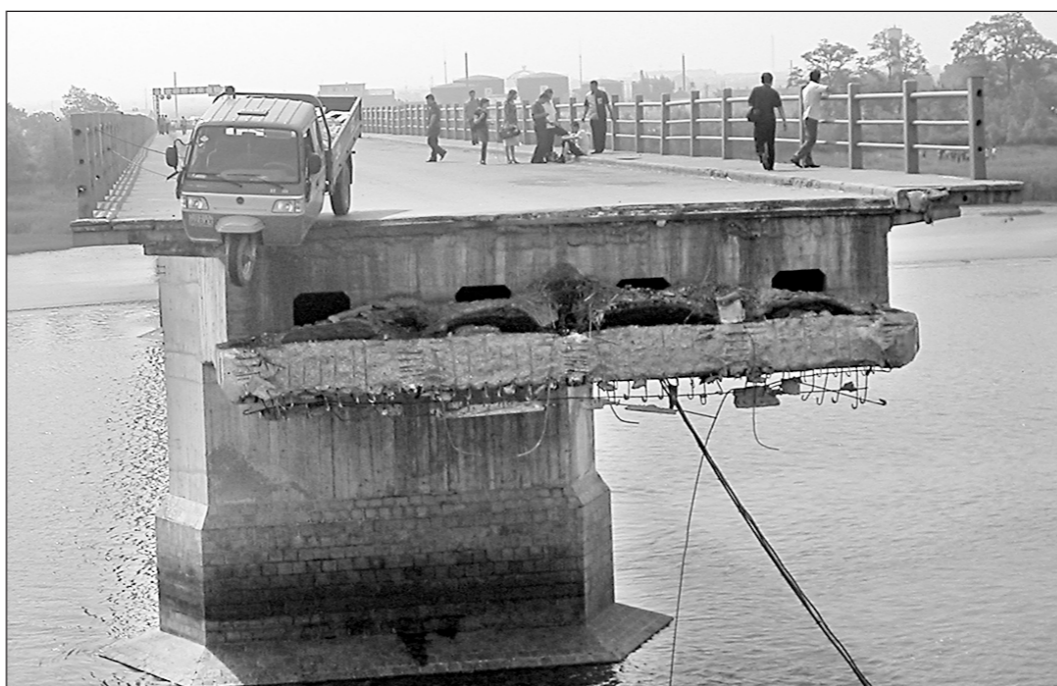


PHOTO: AFP

A vehicle hangs on the edge of a 20-metre (66 foot) span of the Tianzhuangtai Bridge, a two-lane bridge built in 1976 on the 305 national road in Panjin city, northeast China's Liaoning province, which suddenly caved in at 7.02 am yesterday. A central section of a major road bridge collapsed in northeast China early yesterday sending vehicles plunging into a river below.