

Allawi vows to crush Iraqi insurgents

REUTERS, Baghdad

Iraq's interim prime minister has vowed to crush Baathist die-hards and foreign militants he blamed for killing 100 people in a day of suicide bombings and attacks meant to sabotage next week's move toward Iraqi rule.

"These are isolated incidents," said Iyad Allawi. "We are going to defeat them... We have been expecting this escalation and we are expecting more escalation in the days ahead."

Three US soldiers were among those killed in Thursday's bold assaults on Iraqi security forces in Baghdad and the mainly Sunni Muslim cities of Baquba, Falluja and Ramadi.

Iraq's third largest city Mosul was the worst hit, with four suicide bombings killing 62 people, including a US soldier, and wound-

ing 220, a senior military official said.

He said the attacks showed signs of loose coordination between groups intent on destabilizing Iraq and warned of more bloodshed before and after the June 30 handover, when US-led occupation formally ends and Allawi's government takes over.

Allawi told reporters late Thursday he believed Ansar al-Islam, a group linked to Jordanian militant Abu Musab Zarqawi, was behind the Mosul bombings.

He blamed Baathists loyal to deposed dictator Saddam Hussein for the attacks in Ramadi and Baquba.

A group led by Zarqawi, who Washington says has links to Osama bin Laden's al-Qaeda network, claimed responsibility for the attacks in a statement on an Islamist Web site.

"Your brothers in Jama'at al-Tawhid and Jihad launched a wide assault in several governorates in the country which included strikes against the apostate police agents and spies and the Iraq army, alongside their American brothers," it said.

Zarqawi, whose group has claimed responsibility for the beheadings of an American and a South Korean hostage in Iraq, threatened Wednesday to assassinate Allawi.

A CIA official in Washington said Thursday the voice on the audiotaped message was probably Zarqawi's.

Some of the black-clad gunmen who attacked police and government buildings in Baquba proclaimed loyalty to Zarqawi and wore yellow headbands linking them to his group.

Bush quizzed on CIA leak

AP, Washington

The probe into who leaked the name of a CIA operative to a journalist moved to the highest level of government as federal investigators spent more than an hour with President Bush.

"The leaking of classified information is a very serious matter," said White House press secretary Scott McClellan, adding that Bush repeatedly has said he wants his administration to cooperate with the investigation.

Bush was interviewed for 70 minutes on Thursday by US Attorney Patrick J. Fitzgerald, the head of the Justice Department investigation, and by members of his team. McClellan said the only other person in the room was Jim Sharp, a private trial lawyer and former federal prosecutor hired by Bush.

Investigators want to know who leaked the name of Valerie Plame, an undercover CIA operative, to syndicated columnist Robert Novak last July. Disclosure of an undercover officer's identity can be a federal crime.



Greenpeace activists protest with missiles in Istanbul yesterday against the opening of the Nato summit on June 28.

Wolfowitz apologises to Iraq war reporters

REUTERS, Washington

US Deputy Defence Secretary Paul Wolfowitz apologised on Thursday to Iraq war correspondents for saying that many of them were afraid to travel and reported rumors.

In an open letter to journalists in Iraq, Wolfowitz said he appreciated the risks many take in covering the war and that he prays for their safe return.

"I know that many journalists continue to go out each day -- in the most dangerous circumstances -- to bring us coverage of the war in Iraq and Afghanistan," Wolfowitz wrote in the letter provided by a Pentagon spokesman.

Wolfowitz noted that 34 journalists have died covering the war in Iraq and expressed his "sincere thanks" for their work as well as "admiration for their courage."

"To each of you who have worked so hard and taken such risks to cover this story, I extend a heartfelt apology and hope you will accept it," the letter said.



An Indian man wades through floodwaters as he stands outside his home in Goreswar, in the Kamrup district of Assam, some 70km east of Guwahati yesterday. Four more people have drowned in rising waters across India, bringing to 21 the flood death toll. The annual floods have already displaced 220,000 people in 200 submerged villages in Assam and Tripura.

2 US marines killed in northeast Afghanistan

AFP, Kabul

Two US marines were killed and one injured during an operation in northeastern Afghanistan, the US military said yesterday.

"Thursday evening, two marines were killed and one was wounded during an operation northeast of Asadabad," Master Sergeant Cindy Beam told AFP.

"The wounded marine is in stable condition."

No other details were released until the next of kin were notified, she added.

The last two months have seen more than 10 members of the US-led coalition of 20,000 marines, soldiers, air personnel and special operations forces killed in Afghanistan.

Six died in May with another two in June, one killed by a roadside bomb in southcentral Afghanistan and the other during an unexplained incident at the main US base at Bagram north of Kabul which is still being investigated.

55 killed as extremists, army lock in clashes in Yemen

AFP, Sanaa

Nine Yemeni soldiers and 46 extremists have been killed in some four days of clashes in the Saada province near the border with Saudi Arabia, the interior ministry said yesterday.

Dozens of soldiers and supporters of firebrand preacher Hussein Badr Eddin al-Huthi were also wounded in the fighting, which began late last Sunday in the Hidane region, some 250km north of Sanaa, a statement said.

Forty-three extremists were captured and are being questioned, it added.

A ministry source, meanwhile,

told the state news agency SABA that the extremists "used mortars, landmines and rocket-propelled grenades against the army."

"The rebels in custody are being interrogated and justice will be brought to them," the source added.

"The deviant defiant elements who broke the law and order under (Huthi's) command are accused by the government of acts of vandalism including the hoisting of the flag of another country instead of the Yemeni flag," SABA said.

Arms and ammunition were also seized from their hideouts.

"Since security and military forces cordoned off the area, a

number of the surrounded surrendered," the source said.

Yemeni authorities accuse Huthi of stirring trouble by organising anti-US demonstrations after weekly Muslim prayers on Fridays.

His supporters have been branded "outlaws... extremists and trouble-makers", and accused of opening fire on government institutions, breaking into mosques and "roughing up students to stop them from going to school."

Yemen has cracked down on suspected al-Qaeda members and other Islamist militants since the September 11, 2001 attacks in the United States and a series of attacks at home, once a hotbed of armed Muslim extremism.

N Korean N-test threat casts shadow over Beijing talks

REUTERS, Beijing

A North Korean threat to test a nuclear device overshadowed six-way talks in Beijing yesterday after negotiators came up with a series of gestures aimed at resolving the crisis over the North's nuclear ambitions.

US officials said the threat, made in a two-hour meeting between US Assistant Secretary of State James Kelly and North Korean negotiators in Beijing Thursday, resembled those from Pyongyang in the past.

The move has raised doubts that even faint progress can be achieved as the third round of talks among North and South Korea, the United States, Japan, Russia and China ended their third day. The previous rounds ended with agreement only to meet again.

The negotiations were due to end on schedule Saturday, although China's Foreign Ministry canceled a closing ceremony.

Chief negotiators ended Friday's meeting just before 2:30 p.m. (0630 GMT) and deputies were to meet to work on a draft

joint document.

A diplomatic source said China held separate talks with the United States and North Korea, trying to persuade them to agree to issue a statement outlining common ground.

Negotiations have been focused on a US offer of conditional aid and security guarantees to try to break a 20-month-old deadlock in the nuclear crisis. North Korea has put forward its own plan demanding rewards in return for freezing its ambitions.

While few had expected a breakthrough, the US proposal was the most detailed offer since President Bush took office and branded the North as part of an "axis of evil" alongside Iran and pre-war Iraq.

North Korea has issued no formal statement on the US proposal and its test threat was another sign of the gulf dividing the United States and North Korea, the protagonists in a crisis that has simmered since October 2002 when Washington said Pyongyang had admitted having a uranium enrichment program.

GORE SAYS Bush 'intentionally misleading' US Most Americans now call Iraq war a mistake

AFP, REUTERS, Washington

Former vice president Al Gore on Thursday accused President George W. Bush of duping US voters on purpose by falsely linking al-Qaeda to ousted Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein.

Bush is "now intentionally misleading the American people by continuing to aggressively and brazenly assert the linkage between al-Qaeda and Saddam Hussein," Gore said, visibly agitated, during a speech to the law faculty at Georgetown University here.

Gore recalled that an independent commission investigating the September 11, 2001 attacks found in a preliminary report no "credible evidence" of cooperation between Baghdad and al-Qaeda.

Gore said Bush and Vice President Dick Cheney "have decided to fight to the rhetorical death over whether or not there's a meaningful connection between

Iraq and al-Qaeda.

"If Iraq has nothing to do with the attack or the organisation that attacked us, then that means the president took us to war when he didn't have to."

Reuters adds: For the first time since the start of the war in Iraq, a majority of Americans now say the US-led invasion was a mistake, according to a USA Today/CNN/Gallup Poll released Thursday.

Amid continuing violence in Iraq and questions about the justification for the war, 54 percent of the 1,005 Americans polled said it was a mistake to send US troops into Iraq, compared with 41 percent who held that view three weeks ago.

The findings mark the first time since Vietnam that a majority of Americans has called a major deployment of US forces a mistake, USA Today reported on its Web site.

Bush sees 'world becoming safer'

US hopes Nato will help train new Iraqi army

AFP, Dublin

US President George W. Bush insisted in an interview broadcast Thursday the world was becoming a safer place despite a spate of deadly attacks in Iraq and elsewhere in the Middle East.

"I do believe the world is a safer place and becoming a safer place," he told Irish public television RTE in an interview recorded in Washington a day before he arrives in Ireland for a US-EU summit.

Asked about the mounting death toll in Iraq, Bush commented: "Nobody cares more about the deaths than I do". His comments came after insurgents unleashed a wave of apparently coordinated attacks across Iraq on Thursday, leaving at least 89 people dead just six days from the handover of power to an interim Iraqi government.

But Bush said: "I wouldn't be doing this, I wouldn't have made the decisions I did if I didn't think

the world would be better."

"I argue strongly that the world is better off because of the decisions that I have made along with others," he said. "The free world has to make a choice, do we cower in the face of terror or do we lead in the face of terror."

Bush said his administration's policy was "to promote freedom and at the same protect our security."

"I know a free Iraq is going to be necessary and part of changing the world," he said.

Asked about widespread international opposition to his Iraq policy, Bush stated he was not after popularity. "History will judge," he said.

"Saddam Hussein used weapons of mass destruction against his own people, against the neighbourhood," he said. "We have found the capacity for him to make weapons, he was dangerous."

Meanwhile, US President

George W. Bush said yesterday he hoped Nato would agree to provide training for the new Iraqi army to help stabilize that country.

Iraqi Prime Minister Iyad Allawi has asked for Nato to help train police and troops in order to help stabilize the country and "I think we can get a training mission, hopefully," Bush told Turkish NTV television in an interview recorded in Washington a day ahead of his visit here to attend a Nato summit.

Bush said he did not expect to get more troops from Nato countries to participate in the international force already on the ground in Iraq.

"I'm not so sure we're going to get more troops out of any Nato countries. I think most of the Nato countries that have participated with troops are at their limit," he said.

"The only long term solution is for the Iraqi people to be in a position to secure their country," he added.

Guantanamo tribunals are not a 'fair trial': UK

AFP, London

Military tribunals possibly lying in wait for four British nationals at the US-run Guantanamo Bay jail in Cuba do not constitute a fair trial under international law, Britain's top legal adviser will say yesterday.

"While we must be flexible and be prepared to countenance some limitation of fundamental rights if properly justified and proportionate, there are certain principles on which there can be no compromise," Lord Peter Goldsmith will tell the International Criminal Law Association in London, according to early copies of his speech.

"Fair trial is one of those -- which is the reason we in the UK have been unable to accept that the US military tribunals proposed for those detained at Guantanamo Bay offer sufficient guarantees of a fair trial in accordance with international standards," he will say.

In all, nine Britons were held without charge at Guantanamo Bay, a US naval base at the eastern end of Cuba, having been detained in Afghanistan or Pakistan following the September 11, 2001 attacks on the United States.



Unidentified Kashmiri women sit during a demonstration in Srinagar yesterday. The women were taking part in a demonstration for disappeared people after their alleged arrest by Indian security forces. Kashmir's leading human rights organisation the Association of Parents of Disappeared Persons (APDP) is demanding the setting up of a commission to probe disappearances of people in Kashmir since 1989.

Another 'Monica' in Clinton's life!

ANI, London

Bill Clinton's infamous affair with Monica Lewinsky might be public knowledge with the release of his autobiography "My Life," but it seems love is on the roll again for the former US president.

According to The Sun, Clinton is allegedly said to be having a passionate affair with a wealthy divorcee. He is reported to be seeing a beautiful blonde for more than a year at a hideaway in Westchester County, New York, according to the National Enquirer.

The unidentified woman is said to have several young children and got millions in a divorce settlement a few years ago.

"Bill Clinton has been sneaking off to the home of this woman for late-night trysts after her kids are in bed," The Enquirer quoted an insider as saying.

Iran gives written response to IAEA

AFP, Tehran

Iran's top national security official has written to the International Atomic Energy Agency and the three main European powers to respond to a resolution critical of its cooperation, a foreign ministry spokesman said yesterday.

However the official refused to confirm or deny that the letter announced a resumption in production of centrifuges used for uranium enrichment, despite a three-month-old deal with the Europeans to halt such work.

"Hassan Rowhani has sent a letter to the foreign ministers of France, Germany and Britain as well as to (IAEA chief) Mohamed ElBaradei", Hamid Reza Asefi told AFP.

He added only that the message from Rowhani, head of Iran's Supreme National Security Council and top nuclear negotiator, "outlined Iran's point of view

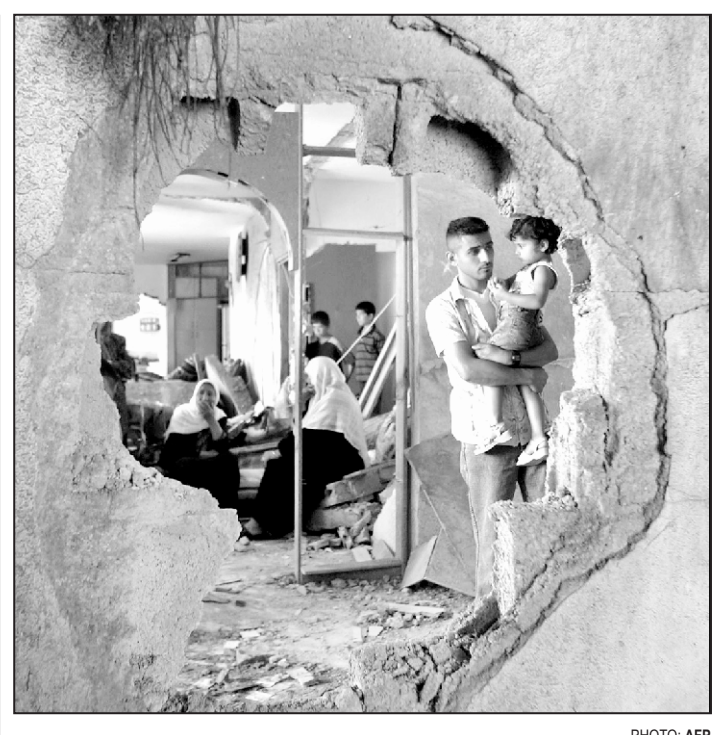
on nuclear technology and its use."

In Washington Thursday, John Bolton, US undersecretary of state for arms control and international security, said the announcement was a direct violation of Iranian pledges to the three European powers and proof of Iran's intent to reprocess uranium as part of a covert nuclear weapons programme.

"This is an act of defiance of the IAEA board of governors, it is a thumb in the eye of the international community," Bolton told the international relations committee of the US House of Representatives.

Iran insists its nuclear programme is directed solely towards generating electricity.

But a week ago the IAEA adopted a resolution sponsored by the EU three that criticised the clerical regime for failing to live up to its pledges of total cooperation with the Vienna-based watchdog.



Palestinians gather at Islamic Jihad leader Bassem Abu Aker's house, which was destroyed by the Israeli army in the West Bank town of Bethlehem yesterday. According to the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) Abu Aker, who was arrested about a month ago, was involved in an attack in Jerusalem three years ago in which five people were wounded.