

'China to smash independence bid of Taiwan'

AFP, Beijing

China's defence minister has warned that the country's army has the will and the strength to "smash" any attempt by Taiwan to become independent, state media reported yesterday.

Adding to weeks of escalating Chinese rhetoric, Cao Gangchuan issued the stark message at a ceremony to celebrate the 77th anniversary of the 2.5-million-strong People's Liberation Army, the People's Daily said.

"If Taiwan independence forces continue to act willfully, the People's Liberation Army has the determination and capability to resolutely smash any "Taiwan independence' splittist conspiracy," he said.

"China's sovereignty and territorial integrity is the supreme objective, and the will of 1.3 billion Chinese can not be violated," he told a gathering late Saturday at Beijing's Great Hall of the People.

British spy chief asked experts to harden Iraqi WMD report

AFP, London

The new head of Britain's foreign intelligence service MI6 tried to persuade weapons inspectors in Iraq to harden up a report on their search for weapons of mass destruction (WMDs), a British newspaper reported yesterday.

According to the Mail on Sunday, John Scarlett sent a confidential email to the head of the Iraqi Survey Group (ISG) on March 8 this year with a list of 10 claims, which had already been shown to be untrue, for possible inclusion in the report.

At the time Scarlett, who takes up the top job at MI6 this week, was chairman of the Joint Intelligence Committee, which co-ordinates Britain's spying efforts.

The 10 "golden nuggets" suggested by Scarlett included claims that Iraq had a secret smallpox programme, that Iraq had developed mobile chemical weapons laboratories and that the country possessed or was building a "rail gun" for use in nuclear weapons research, according to the Mail on Sunday.

'al-Qaeda threat can't deter Pak terror fight'

Gunmen kill 5 troops in Baluchistan

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistan vowed yesterday it would not be deterred by al-Qaeda threats of further attacks after the terror group claimed responsibility for an assassination attempt on prime minister-designate Shaukat Aziz.

"It strengthens our resolve to continue our fight against terrorism," military spokesman Major General Shaukat Sultan told AFP.

He said al-Qaeda's claim of responsibility for Friday's suicide bomb attack on Aziz confirmed Pakistan's assessment that the group was involved in terrorist acts in the country.

"It only confirms our assessment of their involvement," he said refer-



PHOTO: AFP

Palestinians, foreigners and Israelis from the International Solidarity Movement (ISM) hold a banner during their march along the path of the Israeli "security" barrier near the West Bank village of Umm Dar yesterday. The march, which began July 30 in Jenin area, will pass through cities, towns and villages affected by the barrier all the way to Jerusalem till August 19.

SAUDI FM SAYS

Muslim troops would replace US-led forces in Iraq

AFP, Riyadh

Saudi Arabia's foreign minister said yesterday that any Muslim troops dispatched to Iraq would be sent to replace US-led multinational forces and not to supplement them as proposed by Washington.

"The dispatching of Muslim troops to Iraq needs a number of requirements to be met, (including) that these troops would be replacing the coalition forces currently there, not supplementing them," Prince Saud al-Faisal told reporters.

He also said that troops should be sent only at Baghdad's request and work under the auspices of the United Nations.

"The request should come from the Iraqi government and should have a full and apparent backing

from all parts of the Iraqi people ... (These troops) should work under the auspices of the UN," he said.

Prince Saud discussed the Saudi idea to send Muslim troops to Iraq with US Secretary of State Colin Powell and Iraqi Prime Minister Iyad Allawi while they both visited the kingdom last week.

"The UN should be in charge of the political process in Iraq including the preparation for elections to choose a new government," said Saud, whose comments to the press were carried by state television.

Both Powell and Allawi said that Iraq's immediate neighbours would not be asked to participate in such a deployment.

"We will study the suggestion and we continue to discuss it with leaders of Arab and Muslim states,

excluding neighbouring countries, to participate in the multinational force," said the Iraqi premier.

According to Powell, "many" Muslim countries have been considering participating in the force.

"Many of them said they needed to see a UN mandate. Now there is a UN mandate under (Security Council Resolution) 1546. They also said they wished to see a sovereign government.

"There is a sovereign government that is up and running," he stressed.

A senior US official accompanying Powell to the kingdom said the idea was not to replace the current US-led multinational force comprising troops from some 30 countries, but to have a "supplemental" force.

Tigers blame Lanka for war preparation

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka's Tamil Tiger rebels have accused the government of gearing up for a fresh war following the failure of Norway's latest shuttle diplomacy to revive the island's moribund peace bid.

The pro-rebel Tamilnet website quoted a Tiger political wing leader, C. Ilamparithi accusing President Chandrika Kumaratunga of strengthening her security forces to renew hostilities despite the Norway-brokered truce that has been in place since February 2002.

"We are certain of victory if the Sri Lanka government launches a war to occupy our traditional homeland," Ilamparithi said over the weekend.

"Sri Lanka's president is not keen on maintaining the current peace

environment. Her deeds and words are leading Sri Lanka to renewed hostility and war."

No comment was immediately available from the government on the rebel allegations.

The statements came as police accused the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) of gunning down a rival Tamil rebel, Kandiah Yogarasa, in the capital Colombo Saturday.

Police said Yogarasa, 41, was a top informant for the military and had been in contact with a renegade Tiger leader, V. Muralitharan, better known as Karuna, who led a split in March and went underground five weeks later.

The Tigers have accused the government of trying to crush their organisation by using the breakaway leader Karuna whose whereabouts are unknown.

PALESTINIAN LEADERS WARN

West Bank on verge of unprecedented chaos

AFP, Jenin

Palestinian leaders warned the West Bank was on the verge of unprecedented chaos, as thousands of demonstrators showed their support yesterday for militants who attacked the offices here of the security services and the local governor.

Prime minister Ahmed Qorei said it was vital that the Palestinians unite to prevent the same kind of chaos seen last month in the Gaza Strip last month, which led him to submit his resignation, from spreading to the West Bank.

"We, the Palestinian people, must stand united in condemning this chaos

in the same manner that we deterred the chaos that took place in Gaza," he said in an interview published in Sunday's Al-Quds daily.

"If this chaos reaches the West Bank, then we will be on the verge of an unprecedented and unacceptable disaster."

However in a fresh challenge to the Palestinian Authority, around 5,000 people took to the streets of Jenin, in the northern West Bank, in support of the al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades after its followers torched the local offices of the security services and the district governor over the weekend.

Dozens of fighters fired off rounds of

gunfire into the air, pledging support for the powerful local leader of the Brigades, Zakaria Zubeidi.

"Anyone touches him (Zubeidi), we will kill him. Anyone who touches him is a collaborator," the crowd chanted in unison.

Zubeidi justified Saturday's arson attack on the security services by charging its officers were "cooperating" with Israel's Shin Beth domestic intelligence service to wipe out members of his organisation.

Television footage broadcast over the weekend also showed Al-Aqsa militants, their faces uncovered, ransacking the offices of the governor

Qaddura Musa and tearing down portraits of Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat from the walls to throw them in the fire.

Al-Aqsa has traditionally been loyal to Arafat but has become increasingly frustrated at what it sees as widespread corruption within both the Palestinian Authority and Arafat's Fatah movement.

While some of the gunmen in Sunday's march masked their faces with scarves bearing the image of the famed Al-Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem, others made no attempt to disguise their identity.



PHOTO: AFP

Residents of the area gather near the remains of a suicide car bomb that exploded yesterday outside a police station in the northern Iraqi city of Mosul. At least five people were killed and more than 50 wounded.

EU 'Big-3' fail to make progress in nuclear talks with Iran

AFP, Tehran

Talks which Britain, France and Germany held with Iran last week on its nuclear programme produced "no substantial progress" in efforts to restrict the Islamic republic's activities, European diplomats said yesterday.

Officials from the European Union's "big three" met with an Iranian delegation in Paris on Thursday and Friday, and stressed their wish to see a halt to Iran's work on the sensitive nuclear fuel cycle.

"Each side repeated their positions, and there were no changes," said a diplomat from one of the three European states.

"We would like Iran to stop nuclear fuel cycle work, but Iran sees its suspension as just a temporary measure. Therefore, no substantial progress was made," the source told AFP.

"This is disappointing, but having said that, nobody was honestly expecting a breakthrough," the diplomat added. "The meeting was more aimed at keeping up contacts."

Iran announced Saturday it had resumed making parts for centrifuges used for enriching uranium.

Although Foreign Minister Kamal Kharazi asserted that Iran was committed to a suspension of enrichment itself, he did say "no country has the right to deprive us of nuclear technology".

Indian troops kill 10 rebels in Kashmir

AFP, Srinagar

Indian troops shot dead 10 Kashmiri rebels, including a commander, in separate clashes across Indian Kashmir, police said yesterday.

Seven of the militants were gunned down in the northern district of Baramulla in three separate clashes Sunday, a police spokesman told AFP.

Sameer Gujar, the deputy chief commander of the pro-Pakistan militant group al Barq (The Lightning), and his bodyguard were among seven killed in pre-dawn "cordon and search operations" launched by the troops, he said.

"Sameer Gujar and his bodyguard were killed in the Kreeri village while five others were gunned down in two other villages of Chandusa and Heevan."

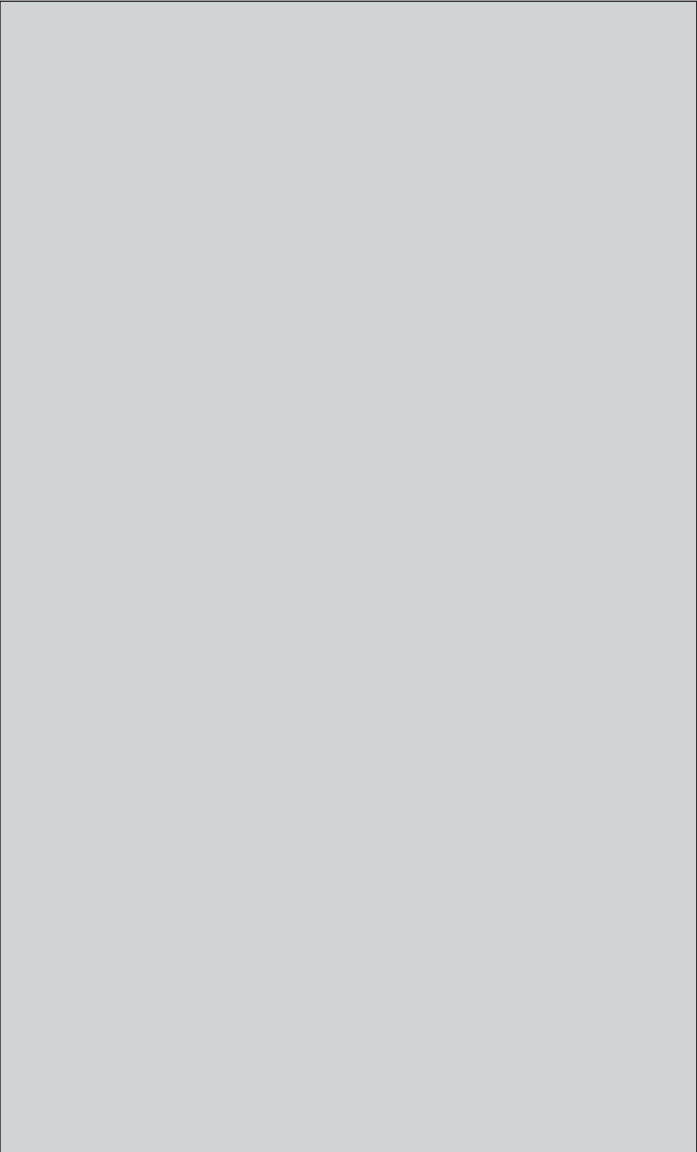


PHOTO: AFP

A freed Iraqi prisoner hugs his brother following his release from the Abu Ghraib prison yesterday at al-Ameriyah military base, west of Baghdad. Dozens of Iraqi prisoners were released yesterday from the infamous US-run Abu Ghraib prison while a suicide car bombing killed 5 people and wounded 50 others outside a police station in the northern Iraqi city of Mosul.

Poland marks start of Warsaw uprising

AFP, Warsaw

Leaders from the United States, Britain and their wartime foe Germany converged on Warsaw yesterday to mark the start sixty years ago of a doomed Polish uprising against the Nazis in which the city was turned to rubble.

Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder arrived to make an unprecedented appearance by a German head of government at the commemorations, marking a further chapter in the reconciliation between the neighbours and wartime enemies.

US Secretary of State Colin Powell and Britain's Deputy Prime Minister John Prescott also represented Poland's wartime western allies, accused of doing too little to help the insurgency, in which 200,000 Poles were killed.

Powell, pointing to Poland's May 1 membership of the European Union and 1999 membership of NATO, promised Warsaw, a key US ally in Iraq, would not be left on its own again.

"Poland will never be alone again as it was 60 years ago," he told a news conference.

"The United States will always be with Poland."

The 63-day uprising, launched on the stroke of 5:00 pm (1500 GMT) on August 1, 1944 by the non-communist resistance group, the Polish Home Army (AK), was directed militarily against the German Nazis, who occupied Warsaw at the time.