

## Jordanian kidnapped in Iraq

AFP, Amman

A Jordanian man has been kidnapped in Iraq, the second in 24 hours, a Jordanian foreign ministry spokesman said early yesterday.

"We have received information of a kidnapping in Iraq on Tuesday of Jordanian Taha al-Maharmeh," the spokesman, a Mr. Ayed, was quoted as saying by the official Petra news agency.

Another Jordanian man had alerted Amman's embassy in Iraq of the kidnapping, he added, without giving details.

On Monday a Jordanian businessman was snatched from his Baghdad home by an unknown group demanding a 250,000-dollar ransom for his release, his son said Tuesday.

Sameh, a son of Jamal Sadek al-Salaymeh, 63, said he had no other details on Monday's kidnapping.

But the victim, a father of three, had contacted a friend "to tell him that the kidnappers are negotiating a ransom with him and they had reached agreement on a sum of 250,000 dollars", the son said.



PHOTO: AFP

An injured man is wheeled into al-Qadissiya hospital in Baghdad's Sadr City slum yesterday 2004 after being wounded during clashes between militiamen loyal to radical Iraqi Shiite Muslim cleric Moqtada Sadr and US forces. Fighting raged on in Sadr's Baghdad stronghold for the sixth straight day.

## Indian govt repeals 'controversial' Pota

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

The Indian cabinet on Tuesday night approved repeal of a tough controversial anti-terror law to fulfill the electoral promise of the country's ruling Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA).

Information Minister S Jaipal Reddy told reporters after a meeting of the cabinet presided by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh that a bill repealing the Prevention of Terrorism Act (POTA) would be introduced in the second half of the budget session of Parliament beginning on August 16.

He said another bill would be introduced in Parliament to effect major amendments to the existing Unlawful Activities Act of 1967 in order to maintain a tight grip on terrorists and their funding network.

The POTA was enacted in a rare joint sitting of Parliament on March 26, 2002 during the rule of BJP-led government amidst stiff resistance from Congress and other opposition parties at that time. The opposition had alleged at that time that the law would be used against political rivals.

However, the POTA was not enforced in more than half of India's 26 states and federally-ruled territories. A total of 301 cases involving 1600 people were filed under the law.

Among the key politicians held under POTA was Vaiko, the chief of Murchi Dravida Munnetra Kazhghakham (MDMK), a party in the southern state of Tamil Nadu and a constituent of UPA. Vaiko was arrested on the charge of publicly speaking in favor of Sri Lankan separatist outfit LTTE. Many other people were also arrested under the law in Gujarat after the communal riots in that state in 2002.

Reddy said amendments to the Unlawful Activities Act would address concerns of national security including funding of terrorist groups.

When the BJP-led government had enacted the POTA, it had also set up independent review committees to scrutinize all arrests made under the law in order to ensure that it was not misused. Later, as a further safeguard, the government had made mandatory recommendations of the review committees about the arrests under the law.

## Indian police arrest 300 striking lawyers

PTI, New Delhi

At least 300 striking lawyers were arrested yesterday from the Tis Hazari lower courts in New Delhi for allegedly preventing judges from attending court by locking the gates of the complex.

More than 20 police jeeps were deployed to take the lawyers, on strike for the second day to protest the shifting of 12 courts to the Rohini district court complex in northwest Delhi.

The bar association of Tis Hazari, comprising about 7,000 Delhi-based lawyers, had closed all the seven gates on Wednesday, disallowing normal functioning of the courts that see around 80,000 litigants a day.

"The section of the Rohini court building is still unfinished. There is no parking space, no proper lawyer's chamber and no litigant's room. How can they ask us to shift there?" asked a spokesperson for the lawyers.

He said the strike would continue until their demands were met. "More than 20 police jeeps have arrested hundreds of our members, but we still have so many more."

## UN accuses Sudan of bombing Darfur

BBC NEWS ONLINE

The United Nations says the Sudanese government has carried out fresh bombing raids on rebels in the province of Darfur using helicopter gunships.

Refugees are also coming under attack in southern Darfur from the pro-government Janjaweed militia, it said.

The lobby group Human Rights Watch has also accused Sudan of breaking pledges to rein in the militias. In a report, HRW said that the outside world had failed to prevent atrocities that have forced many people to flee.

The Sudanese ambassador to Britain, Dr Hassan Abdin, rejected Human Rights Watch accusations that Janjaweed militiamen were being incorporated into government security forces in Darfur.

"To talk of governments acting in connivance and collaboration with the Janjaweed is not true," Abdin told the BBC's World Today programme.

He said Sudan was acting to rein in the militia and had arrested and tried 100 of its members.

The UN's office for the co-ordination

## Iraqis blame US for continuous fighting

AFP, Sadr City

Lying on a hospital bed, 14-year-old Mortada Mushatet is an avid supporter of Iraq's Shiite Muslim uprising after he was shot during clashes with US forces in the militia's Baghdad bastion.

With his abdomen heavily bandaged and surviving on fluids, a pallid Mushatet says a US soldier shot him in the stomach on his way to buy groceries.

"I had stepped out to buy something for my home when suddenly I felt like I was electrocuted," said Mushatet, the sole wage-earner for a family of four.

"I fell to the ground and did not know what happened, but felt extreme pain in my stomach. And then I saw blood pumping out of my stomach and this American soldier standing across the street firing randomly."

Lying in a Sadr City hospital for the past four days, Mushatet has sworn his revenge, blaming US forces for the

persistent violence in his impoverished neighbourhood.

"I am very angry and would definitely like to take my revenge. What had I done to get shot like this?" Mushatet asked, as his mother and aunt looked on helplessly at his bedside.

An ice-cream vendor, Mushatet had been prevented by his mother from opening his shop as tensions mounted in the district, a stronghold of radical militia leader Moqtada Sadr.

"Every day we used to see American tanks moving around, while the Mehdi Army was also gearing up, so there was a lot of tension in the area," said Mushatet's 45-year-old mother, Saleema.

"I forced him to stay at home for days. I told him not to open the shop as it was dangerous. But see what happened. It is our fate, he is the sole earner for the family."

Mushatet's father is elderly. His

elder brother is unemployed and suffering from a serious illness, Saleema said, blaming herself and the Americans for her son's trauma.

"I just told him to buy some groceries for the house, so he stepped out and was shot mercilessly. The fight is between the Americans and Sadr's army, but why shoot young innocent boys?" she asked, tears in her bloodshot eyes.

"Please do something about it. Tell the world about this. We need help."

The fate of 30-year-old housewife Nidal Jassen was little different.

Shot in her left thigh last Thursday, Jassen blames US soldiers for the violence in Sadr City.

"It was around 1:00 pm (0900 GMT). I was with my children in my home when there was loud noise of gunfire outside.

"Instinctively, I ran out to look and saw an American soldier shooting from his vehicle. Before I could step back, I was shot in my leg."

## Rumsfeld in Afghanistan ahead of polls

AFP, Kabul

US Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld held talks with US commanders and Afghan leaders in Kabul yesterday to review strategy as insurgents step up attacks to disrupt historic October presidential elections.

Rumsfeld travelled to the Afghan capital from Oman where he warned that the drug trade from massive opium poppy crops was hampering US efforts to foster democracy in the war-torn central Asian state.

Shortly after landing in Kabul he flew to the main eastern city Jalalabad to meet a US military-run team of soldiers and civilians helping to provide security and with reconstruction projects. Jalalabad lies in the center of one of Afghanistan's biggest poppy farming regions.

Rumsfeld met the US commander of the team, known as a Provincial Reconstruction Team, before meeting local dignitaries.

Back in Kabul he was due to meet Afghan President Hamid Karzai, who is running for re-election on October 9 against 17 other candidates, and Defence Minister Mohammad Qasim Fahim.



PHOTO: AFP

Mithal al-Alussi, one of the leaders of Ahmed Chalabi's Iraqi National Congress (INC), gives a press conference at the party's Baghdad headquarters yesterday.

## Army launches offensive against Maoist rebels

AFP, Kathmandu

Nepal's armed forces launched ground and air raids yesterday against remote Maoist rebel strongholds, an army official said, after the guerrillas threatened to encircle the capital and starve it of supplies.

Military planes and ground forces attacked far-flung rebel positions in the Maoist-dominated west and far north-east after dropping leaflets warning villagers to stay indoors, the official said.

"We have launched air and ground operations to crush the Maoists," the senior official, who spoke on condition of anonymity, told AFP.

He did not say how many troops were involved in the drive to flush out the rebels or whether there had been any military casualties. But he said five alleged guerrillas were killed "in action" in raids in the far west.

The rebels have been waging an increasingly deadly battle to topple the constitutional monarchy and install a communist republic. The uprising, launched in 1996, has so far claimed nearly 10,000 lives.

The Royal Nepalese Army launched the offensive after the rebels said they would seek to blockade Kathmandu and stop food and other goods from reaching the capital indefinitely from next week unless the government bows to their demands.

Those demands including punishment of army officials who allegedly violated human rights by killing Maoist activists, freedom for jailed comrades and information about missing guerrillas.

The rebels, who model themselves on Peru's Shining Path guerrillas, have told vehicles to stay off roads leading to the capital of the poverty-hit Himalayan

nation from next Wednesday.

"Apart from encircling the capital, the Maoists are planning to attack in the far western and far eastern Nepal district over the next three months, and the army is getting fully prepared to crush them," the army official said.

Since the collapse of peace talks with the government last year, the Maoists have sought to blockade towns and villages, attacking vehicles and drivers who disobeyed their orders.

They have also sought to enforce numerous general strikes in the capital and rural areas, many of which observers say have been heeded as much out of fear of the rebels as support for their cause.

## al-Qaeda captives deny 9/11 suspect knew of plot

REUTERS, Hamburg

Captured al-Qaeda leaders have told US interrogators that a Moroccan man on trial in Germany over the September 11 attacks had no knowledge of the attack plans, a Hamburg court was told yesterday.

The US Department of Justice provided the court with summaries from interrogations of Ramzi bin al-Shaibah and Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, which could help Mounir El Motassadeq, a Moroccan accused of helping the 2001 suicide hijackers.

Presiding Judge Ernst-Rainer Schudt said: "We have to think about what this means for the trial."

The letters, received from the Department of Justice in response to the court's request for information, were read in court by a German translator at the retrial of Motassadeq, accused of plotting the attacks with Mohamed Atta and others.

## Luck shines even in jail!

AFP, London

A rapist and serial sex attacker serving life in a British prison has won seven million pounds (10.5 million euros, 12.8 million dollars) on the country's National Lottery, a report said on Tuesday.

Iorworth Hoare, 52, was on temporary weekend release at a bail hostel when his lucky numbers came up in Saturday's draw, the Sun newspaper reported.

Before the huge win, Hoare -- who was jailed for life in 1989 -- was considered a low-security detainee at Leyhill open prison in Gloucestershire, central England, and was allowed to spend weekends away.

However now he was rich Hoare had been moved to a higher-security jail and refused leave, the Sun reported.

Under official prison guidelines, prisoners on day release or community projects are allowed to take part in the lottery and claim prizes.

In an editorial on Wednesday, the Sun demanded a change to the law to prevent "vermin" like Hoare becoming rich through such wins.

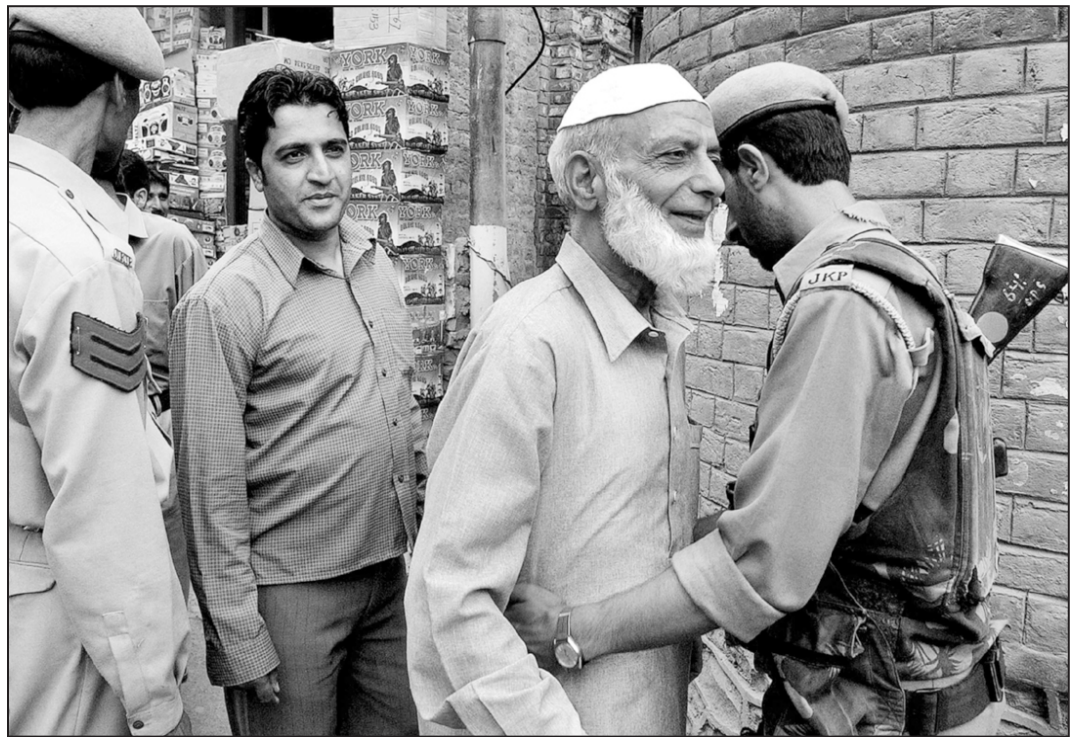


PHOTO: AFP

An Indian Police officer (R) frisks a Kashmiri civilian during a stop and search operation in Srinagar's main commercial hub Lal Chowk, yesterday. Security in the summer capital of the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir has been tightened ahead of celebrations to mark India's Independence day on 15 August, amid calls from Kashmiri separatists for a strike on the same day.