

IRAN SAYS
Iraq admits
arresting
missing
journalists

AFP, Tehran

Iraq's US-backed caretaker government has now admitted that three reporters for Iran's state IRNA news agency who went missing on August 9 were detained by police, a senior interior ministry official said in comments published here Saturday.

"Now that the Iraqi government has officially acknowledged that it arrested the IRNA reporter and his staff, it is responsible for their safety," Amir Hossein Motahari told Tehran dailies.

Foreign Minister Kamal Kharazi had announced on Thursday that he had assurances that IRNA's Baghdad bureau chief Mostafa Darban, who went missing with Iraqi colleagues Mohammad Khafaji and Mohsen Madani, was in good health.

Pakistan blocks
media website
for anti-military
stance

PTI, New York

Pakistan has blocked the web site of South Asia Tribune, which is run by a well-known journalist of the country, apparently for its anti-military stance.

The site, run by Shaheen Sehbai, is known for posting stories which question the military regime's actions and it advocates democracy for the country.

Condemning the Pakistani government action, SAT said yesterday that it "directly contradicts" the "loud claims about press freedom in Pakistan."

In a statement, SAT's Editor Sehbai said the site was originally blocked in May 2003 but three months ago, some Internet providers had unblocked it and readers had started accessing without using bypass routes.

But he promised the readers that SAT would continue provide alternate routes to enable them access the site.

3 convicted drug
traffickers hanged
in public in Iran

AFP, Tehran

Three Iranian men convicted of drug trafficking have been hanged in a square in the historic city of Kerman in southeast Iran on Thursday, the conservative Jomhuri Eslami daily reported Saturday.

The report, quoting the local judiciary and giving only their first names, said Gholamreza, Mohammad and Hamid, were convicted of drug and arms trafficking.

Gholamreza was also found guilty of dealing in alcohol, which is strictly banned in Islamic Iran.

Some 3,500 kilos (nearly 7700 pounds) of opium and morphine, 11 Kalashnikovs, and other weapons that were in possession of the last two were seized, the report said.

Murder, armed robbery, rape, apostasy and serious drug trafficking are all punishable by death in the Islamic republic.

Accused Hamas
leader denies
terror charges

AFP, Damascus

A senior official of the Palestinian militant group Hamas indicted in the United States for conspiring to fund terror attacks against Israel denied the accusations and said the charges were driven by election-year politics in the United States.

"This is election campaigning," Mousa Abu Marzook, deputy chief of the Hamas political bureau, told The Associated Press in Damascus on Friday. "They (US officials) want to say to the American public that they are succeeding in fighting terrorism."

"Every week they come up with a new case before the American public, but these (the cases) are drawn from files that are tens of years old," he said.

Speaking by telephone from Damascus, where he has been living for several years, Abu Marzook said he had "nothing to do with" the accusations.

In Washington on Friday, US Attorney General John Ashcroft announced that Abu Marzook, Abdelfaleem Hasan, Abdelfaiz Ashqar, who lives in Alexandria, Va., and Muhammad Hamid Khalil Salah of Chicago, were indicted for their roles in 15-year racketeering conspiracy in the United States and abroad.



An Iraqi Shiite Muslim shows mortar shrapnel fired by US forces and landed inside the Shrine of Imam Ali in the holy city of Najaf, yesterday. Insistence from a top Moqtada Sadr aide, Ali Smeisim, that the keys to Imam Ali mausoleum, one of the holiest pilgrimage sites in the world, were still firmly in the Medhi Army's possession contradicted reports from other sources that they had been delivered to Iraq's top Shiite cleric Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani. A spokesman for Sistani, who is in London recovering from medical treatment, and Sadr's junior spokesman Sheikh Ahmed al-Shabani had both said the keys had been given up.

Sadr's men continue to hold shrine

REUTERS, Najaf

Fighters loyal to rebel Shi'ite cleric Moqtada al-Sadr were firmly in control of Najaf's Imam Ali mosque yesterday, giving the lie to government claims that police had taken control of the shrine.

Militiamen brandished weapons defiantly and mocked Iraq's interim government around the mosque, at the center of a confrontation with US forces that has helped drive oil prices to record highs and presented the government with its biggest crisis yet.

Holding out hope for a peaceful resolution, one of Sadr's top aides said the rebel leader wanted to hand over Iraq's holiest Shi'ite shrine to Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, the country's most influential Shi'ite cleric, and that talks on the mosque's future were underway.

"We would like to hand over the shrine to the religious establishment which has the right to control it," Sheikh Ahmad al-Sheibani told reporters. "It is only natural that Ayatollah Sistani should accept it."

Sistani, who usually lives in Najaf, is

now in Britain recovering from surgery. But Sadr's aide later added that Sadr's militia would continue to guard the mosque after any handover, precisely the outcome that Iraq's interim government has vowed to prevent.

Sheibani said no time had been set for a handover of the mosque and called on the interim government of Prime Minister Iyad Allawi, which has threatened to storm the mosque, to pursue a peaceful solution to the crisis.

Hundreds of young men inside the shrine chanted slogans vilifying Allawi, who has called on them to lay down their weapons and leave the golden-domed shrine.

Sheibani said Sadr had agreed to hand over the keys to the shrine to Sistani's aides, but did not say when. Such a handover would be largely symbolic if Sadr's fighters remained in place in and around the mosque, where they have been fighting off efforts by US and Iraqi government forces to dislodge them.

The sound of explosions echoed across the holy city early on Saturday,

One dead as Nepal rebels vow to step up blockade

AFP, Kathmandu

Maoist rebels who have cut off Nepal's capital for four days, pledged to expand their campaign to the Tibetan border as fresh violence left a police officer dead.

The rebel defiance came a day after the government appealed to the Maoists to call off the blockade and resume negotiations to end the increasingly deadly insurgency which has claimed nearly 10,000 lives since 1996.

The Maoists have not physically surrounded the city but have warned transporters not to enter the Kathmandu Valley, leading to a siege mentality that has sent some prices soaring in local markets.

The rebels announced they would start a new blockade next Saturday to prevent transport from the only land

connection into Tibet, the Kodari pass, 115 kilometers (70 miles) north of Kathmandu.

"This blockade will stop all vehicles from moving to the frontier," read a statement from Devi Khadka, also known as Asita, who is the Maoist general secretary for three districts near the border.

While the blockade of the Tibetan border is unlikely to have an immediate impact on Kathmandu, it could hinder the growing overland trade with China and for tourists who cross the Himalayas into Tibet.

The Maoists are fighting to abolish the monarchy and draw inspiration from communist China's founder Mao Zedong, although they are disavowed by Beijing, which this month hosted Nepal's Crown Prince Paras.

BJP subverting poll mandate: Sonia

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

In the latest violence in the under-siege Kathmandu Valley, suspected Maoists gunned down a police sub-inspector at Chabahil on the capital's outskirts.

Prithib Bahadur Singh, the head police guard posted to the Gopi Krishna cinema, was hit by two bullets to the chest when he entered the theatre's front yard, a police official said.

He had no explanation as to the motive. The Maoists have regularly targeted businesses that do not pay "donations" to the rebel cause.

On Friday, the rebels bombed two buildings and opened fire on security forces, injuring a guard who remains in a serious condition, police said.

During the fighting,

Since mid-July security agencies have arrested more than 60 Al-Qaeda suspects in urban centers in Pakistan.

They include key operatives such as Al-Qaeda's Pakistani computer whizz Naem Noor Khan and Tanzanian Ahmed Khalaf Gailani, a suspect in the 1998 bombings of two US embassies in East Africa.

Their capture yielded information on Al-Qaeda and led to the discovery of fresh plans to launch attacks in Britain, Pakistan and the United States ahead of US presidential elections in November, intelligence officials say.

During the fighting,

Since mid-July security agencies have arrested more than 60 Al-Qaeda suspects in urban centers in Pakistan.

They include key operatives such as Al-Qaeda's Pakistani computer whizz Naem Noor Khan and Tanzanian Ahmed Khalaf Gailani, a suspect in the 1998 bombings of two US embassies in East Africa.

Their capture yielded information on Al-Qaeda and led to the discovery of fresh plans to launch attacks in Britain, Pakistan and the United States ahead of US presidential elections in November, intelligence officials say.

During the fighting,

Since mid-July security agencies have arrested more than 60 Al-Qaeda suspects in urban centers in Pakistan.

They include key operatives such as Al-Qaeda's Pakistani computer whizz Naem Noor Khan and Tanzanian Ahmed Khalaf Gailani, a suspect in the 1998 bombings of two US embassies in East Africa.

Their capture yielded information on Al-Qaeda and led to the discovery of fresh plans to launch attacks in Britain, Pakistan and the United States ahead of US presidential elections in November, intelligence officials say.

During the fighting,

Since mid-July security agencies have arrested more than 60 Al-Qaeda suspects in urban centers in Pakistan.

They include key operatives such as Al-Qaeda's Pakistani computer whizz Naem Noor Khan and Tanzanian Ahmed Khalaf Gailani, a suspect in the 1998 bombings of two US embassies in East Africa.

Their capture yielded information on Al-Qaeda and led to the discovery of fresh plans to launch attacks in Britain, Pakistan and the United States ahead of US presidential elections in November, intelligence officials say.

During the fighting,

Since mid-July security agencies have arrested more than 60 Al-Qaeda suspects in urban centers in Pakistan.

They include key operatives such as Al-Qaeda's Pakistani computer whizz Naem Noor Khan and Tanzanian Ahmed Khalaf Gailani, a suspect in the 1998 bombings of two US embassies in East Africa.

Their capture yielded information on Al-Qaeda and led to the discovery of fresh plans to launch attacks in Britain, Pakistan and the United States ahead of US presidential elections in November, intelligence officials say.

During the fighting,

Since mid-July security agencies have arrested more than 60 Al-Qaeda suspects in urban centers in Pakistan.

They include key operatives such as Al-Qaeda's Pakistani computer whizz Naem Noor Khan and Tanzanian Ahmed Khalaf Gailani, a suspect in the 1998 bombings of two US embassies in East Africa.

Their capture yielded information on Al-Qaeda and led to the discovery of fresh plans to launch attacks in Britain, Pakistan and the United States ahead of US presidential elections in November, intelligence officials say.

During the fighting,

Since mid-July security agencies have arrested more than 60 Al-Qaeda suspects in urban centers in Pakistan.

They include key operatives such as Al-Qaeda's Pakistani computer whizz Naem Noor Khan and Tanzanian Ahmed Khalaf Gailani, a suspect in the 1998 bombings of two US embassies in East Africa.

Their capture yielded information on Al-Qaeda and led to the discovery of fresh plans to launch attacks in Britain, Pakistan and the United States ahead of US presidential elections in November, intelligence officials say.

During the fighting,

Since mid-July security agencies have arrested more than 60 Al-Qaeda suspects in urban centers in Pakistan.

They include key operatives such as Al-Qaeda's Pakistani computer whizz Naem Noor Khan and Tanzanian Ahmed Khalaf Gailani, a suspect in the 1998 bombings of two US embassies in East Africa.

Their capture yielded information on Al-Qaeda and led to the discovery of fresh plans to launch attacks in Britain, Pakistan and the United States ahead of US presidential elections in November, intelligence officials say.

During the fighting,

Since mid-July security agencies have arrested more than 60 Al-Qaeda suspects in urban centers in Pakistan.

They include key operatives such as Al-Qaeda's Pakistani computer whizz Naem Noor Khan and Tanzanian Ahmed Khalaf Gailani, a suspect in the 1998 bombings of two US embassies in East Africa.

Their capture yielded information on Al-Qaeda and led to the discovery of fresh plans to launch attacks in Britain, Pakistan and the United States ahead of US presidential elections in November, intelligence officials say.

During the fighting,

Since mid-July security agencies have arrested more than 60 Al-Qaeda suspects in urban centers in Pakistan.

They include key operatives such as Al-Qaeda's Pakistani computer whizz Naem Noor Khan and Tanzanian Ahmed Khalaf Gailani, a suspect in the 1998 bombings of two US embassies in East Africa.

Their capture yielded information on Al-Qaeda and led to the discovery of fresh plans to launch attacks in Britain, Pakistan and the United States ahead of US presidential elections in November, intelligence officials say.

During the fighting,

Since mid-July security agencies have arrested more than 60 Al-Qaeda suspects in urban centers in Pakistan.

They include key operatives such as Al-Qaeda's Pakistani computer whizz Naem Noor Khan and Tanzanian Ahmed Khalaf Gailani, a suspect in the 1998 bombings of two US embassies in East Africa.

Their capture yielded information on Al-Qaeda and led to the discovery of fresh plans to launch attacks in Britain, Pakistan and the United States ahead of US presidential elections in November, intelligence officials say.

During the fighting,

Since mid-July security agencies have arrested more than 60 Al-Qaeda suspects in urban centers in Pakistan.

They include key operatives such as Al-Qaeda's Pakistani computer whizz Naem Noor Khan and Tanzanian Ahmed Khalaf Gailani, a suspect in the 1998 bombings of two US embassies in East Africa.

Their capture yielded information on Al-Qaeda and led to the discovery of fresh plans to launch attacks in Britain, Pakistan and the United States ahead of US presidential elections in November, intelligence officials say.

During the fighting,

Since mid-July security agencies have arrested more than 60 Al-Qaeda suspects in urban centers in Pakistan.

They include key operatives such as Al-Qaeda's Pakistani computer whizz Naem Noor Khan and Tanzanian Ahmed Khalaf Gailani, a suspect in the 1998 bombings of two US embassies in East Africa.

Their capture yielded information on Al-Qaeda and led to the discovery of fresh plans to launch attacks in Britain, Pakistan and the United States ahead of US presidential elections in November, intelligence officials say.

During the fighting,

Since mid-July security agencies have arrested more than 60 Al-Qaeda suspects in urban centers in Pakistan.

They include key operatives such as Al-Qaeda's Pakistani computer whizz Naem Noor Khan and Tanzanian Ahmed Khalaf Gailani, a suspect in the 1998 bombings of two US embassies in East Africa.

Their capture yielded information on Al-Qaeda and led to the discovery of fresh plans to launch attacks in Britain, Pakistan and the United States ahead of US presidential elections in November, intelligence officials say.

During the fighting,

Since mid-July security agencies have arrested more than 60 Al-Qaeda suspects in urban centers in Pakistan.

They include key operatives such as Al-Qaeda's Pakistani computer whizz Naem Noor Khan and Tanzanian Ahmed Khalaf Gailani, a suspect in the 1998 bombings of two US embassies in East Africa.

Their capture yielded information on Al-Qaeda and led to the discovery of fresh plans to launch attacks in Britain, Pakistan and the United States ahead of US presidential elections in November, intelligence officials say.

During the fighting,

Since mid-July security agencies have arrested more than 60 Al-Qaeda suspects in urban centers in Pakistan.

They include key operatives such as Al-Qaeda's Pakistani computer whizz Naem Noor Khan and Tanzanian Ahmed Khalaf Gailani, a suspect in the 1998 bombings of two US embassies in East Africa.

Their capture yielded information on Al-Qaeda and led to the discovery of fresh plans to launch attacks in Britain, Pakistan and the United States ahead of US presidential elections in November, intelligence officials say.

During the fighting,

Since mid-July security agencies have arrested more than 60 Al-Qaeda suspects in urban centers in Pakistan.