

Dozens of children victims in Baghdad car bombings

AFP, Baghdad

At least 49 people were killed, dozens of them children, in a series of devastating car bombs that left a trail of carnage in Baghdad and northern Iraq, medics and the US military said.

The bloodiest attack in Iraq was a twin car bombing at the site of a ribbon-cutting ceremony for a new water pumping station in the poor Al-Amel neighbourhood of southwest Baghdad.

A crowd of curious children had gathered to watch the ceremony when the bombs went off, sending clouds of black smoke billowing into the air.

A bloodied witness said he helped carry out 32 bodies of children from the rubble.

There were scenes of hysteria and chaos at Baghdad's Yarmuk hospital where doctors said they received 41 bodies from the bombings.

38 Palestinians killed in two days

100 Israeli tanks roll into Gaza

AFP, Gaza

At least six Palestinians were killed on Friday in fighting in the northern Gaza Strip, just hours after around 100 Israeli tanks moved deep into the area to try to stop militant rocket attacks on Israel.

The latest campaign, which began three days ago and in which 44 Palestinians, 32 only on Thursday, and five Israelis have died, intensified after Prime Minister Ariel Sharon gave a green light to a larger operation codenamed "Days of Penitence".

Troops readied to take control of a six-kilometre (four-mile) deep buffer zone in the northern Gaza Strip to keep militants and rockets away from targets in southern Israel, just across the border, an official told AFP on Friday.

Two Israeli children were killed in a rocket attack on Sderot town on

the second day of the offensive.

The official, a close aide to Sharon, said the operation could broaden and "be more aggressive" if militant rocket attacks continue.

Thirty-five tanks were seen entering Beit Hanun, while another 30 were seen pushing into Beit Lahiya and 30 more spotted moving into the eastern sector of Jabaliya, all in northern Gaza, local residents said.

Israel's security cabinet Thursday approved a broadening of the operation, which it said was opened but would not be "a permanent occupation".

Members of the security cabinet have been allegedly pressing for the army to carry out a second "Defensive Shield-style" operation in the Gaza Strip, Israeli radio said.

Launched in March 2002, that operation saw the army reoccupy most of the West

Bank in a bid to detain Palestinian militants and end a spate of suicide bombings.

But the Sharon aide speaking to AFP on condition of anonymity on Friday said that the means put at the army's disposal in the current raid were "consequent" but "not yet comparable to those used during Operation Defensive Shield."

He said that Operation Day of Penitence would be limited only "if it quickly fulfills its objective to completely stop rocket fire."

"The activity in Gaza has one clear overriding aim -- to prevent the firing of Qassam rockets at Sderot and the firing of mortar shells at Jewish settlements in Gaza," Israeli Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz said while meeting troops about to be deployed in the northern Gaza Strip.

"This activity will take time -- it's not easy, it's complex," he warned.



PHOTO: AFP
A Palestinian man is wheeled into hospital after being wounded in an Israeli helicopter missile attack that killed three Palestinians at the Jabalia refugee camp in the northern Gaza Strip yesterday. Israel's latest campaign, which began three days ago and aims to stop rocket attacks on southern Israel, intensified after Prime Minister Ariel Sharon gave a green light to a larger operation codenamed "Days of Penitence."



PHOTO: AFP
A Shia Iraqi, loyal to radical cleric Moqtada Sadr, breaks down over the coffin of his colleague yesterday who was killed during overnight clashes against US troops in Baghdad's Sadr City neighborhood.

Turkish hostage in Iraq freed by US

AP, Baghdad

US troops freed a Turkish hostage during their push to wipe out insurgents in the city of Samarra Friday, the US military said.

Soldiers of the 1st Infantry Division rescued Yahya Kaya, a construction company employee, during their sweep of the city 60 miles north of Baghdad.

Division spokesman Maj. Neal E. O'Brien said Kaya was evacuated to a medical facility just outside the embattled city. His condition was not given.

The Turkish national worked for the 77 Construction Company in Samarra, the major said, providing no other details.

US and Iraqi forces early Friday launched an assault to seize one of the major bastions of insurgency in Iraq.

Iraqi military officials said that about 80 people have been killed and 100 wounded in the fighting.

AFP from Jakarta: Jakarta was

preparing a crisis team to try to secure the release of two Indonesian women seized by Islamic militants in Iraq but said it had made no decision on whether it would negotiate with kidnappers.

The capture of the women, who were pictured wearing Islamic headscarves in a video shot by the militants and aired on Arabic television, has caused surprise and consternation in Indonesia, the world's largest Muslim-populated country.

Foreign ministry spokesman Marty Natalegawa said Rosidah binti Anom and Rafikan binti Amin, who were working for a British company, had been captured by a group calling itself the Islamic Army in Iraq.

The group, which appears to be an offshoot of another group which has been holding two French journalists since August 20, has not made any ransom or political demands to Indonesia, he said.

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SC issues notices to Lalu in scam case

PTI, New Delhi

The Supreme Court of India on Friday issued notices to Railway Minister Lalu Prasad Yadav, Bihar Chief Minister Rabri Devi, the Centre and CBI on a petition alleging that efforts were made by the UPA government to scuttle the prosecution of the accused in the multi-crore fodder scam cases.

The court also issued notice to Central Board of Direct Taxes on the allegation that the Patna Income Tax Tribunal had hurriedly quashed the income tax demand involving huge money against Yadav.

The petitioners Rajeev Ranjan Singh and BJP MP Sushil Kumar Modi have sought a direction from the court seeking cancellation of the bail granted to Lalu Prasad and Rabri Devi in the fodder scam cases.

Nepal govt invites Maoists for talks

PTI, Kathmandu

Nepal Government on Thursday formally invited Maoists for talks, asserting that it had full executive rights and control of the army and other constitutional bodies, but ruled out any unilateral ceasefire.

"The government once again calls the Maoists for resumption of dialogue with a view to rescuing the country from the present state of violence, destruction and indecision," government spokesman Mohammad Mohsin said after a Cabinet meeting chaired by Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba endorsed the decision of the High-Level Peace Committee to formally call the rebels for talks.

IAEA SAYS Musharraf lied about access to nuke scientist

TNN, Washington

Pakistan's military ruler Pervez Musharraf brazenly lied that the world community had not asked for access to nuclear proliferator A Q Khan, fresh disclosures by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has indicated.

Officials of the IAEA on Thursday publicly rebutted Musharraf's claim in a television interview last week that "nobody" had asked to question Khan in connection with the spread of nuclear technology and materials.

"We have not been allowed by Pakistan to talk to the man," Mohammed ElBaradei, the Director-General of the Agency said in a BBC interview aired on Thursday.

Asked why then Musharraf had made such a statement, ElBaradei said: "I can tell my Pakistani friends that I will be happy to send a team tomorrow to talk to him if we can, absolutely."

In an interview with ABC World News in New York last week, Musharraf was explicitly asked by anchor Peter Jennings why he had not made Khan available to the US and IAEA for questioning.

"Nobody has asked, number one," Musharraf blustered, before bluntly saying that even if Pakistan was asked it would not make him available "because we have good interrogators" and because "it undermines our own capability."

Musharraf also claimed to have "shared all the information that we have."

But the IAEA sees it differently. Although Pakistan had supplied information from the tests it had conducted, El Baradei said the IAEA needed results from its own testing to be able to draw definitive conclusions.

The IAEA is hamstrung by the reluctance on part of the US, which claims to be acting against nuclear proliferation, to back its demand to access Khan. Several American analysts have suggested that Bush is not pushing Pakistan on the Khan issue because he hopes Musharraf will deliver Osama bin Laden before the November 2 election to ensure him a second term.

Some commentators have gone so far as to warn that if the United States is attacked with nuclear weapons, its origins would most likely be Pakistan.

Describing US policy on Pakistan's proliferation as a "colossal mistake that could have devastating repercussions," the Chicago Tribune said in an editorial this week that "Bush can't let Musharraf off the hook. International authorities need to know everything Khan knows. In many ways, that's as crucial to the war on terror as finding Bin Laden." Several other American newspaper have expressed similar views.

'Pakistan killed 100 al-Qaeda terrorists'

PTI, Islamabad

Pakistani security forces have killed about 100 al-Qaeda terrorists during a recent military operation in tribal areas near Afghanistan, state-run TV on Friday quoted Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf as saying.

The president also said the operation in the rugged South Waziristan tribal region was "purely against al-Qaeda."

"During this operation, about 100 al-Qaeda terrorists were killed," Pakistan Television quoted Musharraf as saying aboard a plane on the way back from a foreign visit.

He gave no further details about the slain terror suspects.

His comments came hours before Pakistani Intelligence agents raided a home near Peshawar on Thursday and arrested a Libyan with suspected al-Qaeda links.

Authorities say the man identified himself as Ahmed Abdullah during interrogation.

Pakistan, a key ally of the United States in its war on terror, has deployed about 70,000 troops in its tense tribal regions in an effort to flush out terror suspects, who often target security forces.

Blair eyeing for third term in office

REUTERS, London

Britain's Prime Minister Tony Blair went into hospital on Friday for heart treatment -- but first sought to quell speculation over his future by pledging to serve a full third term if re-elected.

His announcement however had the opposite effect -- sparking frenzied speculation about how long he can go on and whether he was now blocking his powerful No. 2, finance minister Gordon Brown, from taking over.

Blair, 51, called the procedure to correct recurrent heart palpitations "routine." Aides said he would be back at work early next week after an overnight stay in a London hospital.

"I feel fine," he told reporters as he left his Downing Street home for hospital, smiling and waving.

Blair's renewed heart problems surprised Britons, with many blaming the toll of such a grueling job and the flak he has taken over the Iraq war.

But it was Blair's accompanying announcement -- that he wanted to serve a full third term but would not contemplate a fourth -- that really sent UK politicians into a spin.

Blair is expected to call and win an election in May 2005.

"Do I wish to serve a full term? The answer to that is yes. Do I want to go on and on and on? The answer to that is no," Blair said.

The announcement, timed for the final day of his Labour Party conference, seemed to rule out a much-speculated early handover to Brown, widely viewed as the heir-apparent.

But with a full third term possibly taking Blair to 2009, many wondered if that could be too long for Brown, 53, to wait. Some Brown supporters say Blair has reneged on a supposed deal made back in 1994 for a handover of power in a second term.

Analysts said a leadership race was now firmly on the horizon, with Blair losing authority in a third term.

"I think he would become a progressively lame duck," analyst Peter Kellner said. "I would expect him to resign well before the end of the next term."

But Blair insisted Brown would make a "superb" future leader even after a third term for him. "I don't think it rules Gordon out in any shape or form at all," he said.



PHOTO: AFP
A Pakistani policeman holds an automatic weapon as he stands guard in front of a Shia Muslim Mosque in Karachi yesterday following a suspected suicide bomb blast at another mosque in eastern Pakistan killing at least 18 people and leaving dozens injured.