

Car bombs, clashes kill 12 Iraqis

GI killed in bomb attack

REUTERS, AFP, Baghdad

Car bombs and clashes killed 12 Iraqis Monday and three Australian troops were wounded in the first attack on their contingent since the end of the Iraq war.

The Australians were hurt when a car bomb blew up near the Australian embassy in central Baghdad. The US military said the blast killed three Iraqis and wounded at least six.

"This is the first time that Australian vehicles have been attacked by a direct enemy action," Australian Defence Force spokesman Brigadier Mike Hannan said in Canberra.

Reuters television footage showed three corpses covered in blankets and an Australian armored

vehicle knocked off the road at the scene of the morning blast in Hurriya Square.

Australian troops in Baghdad are engaged in diplomatic protection, not security operations. Hannan said there were no diplomats traveling with the convoy when the bomb went off.

Australia was one of the first nations to join the US-led war on Iraq, sending about 2,000 troops, but it has since scaled down its force to about 920 in and around Iraq.

Five civilians were killed during fighting between US forces and insurgents in the rebellious western city of Ramadi, local hospital director Abdul Moneim Aftan said.

He blamed the deaths in eastern Ramadi on US snipers, saying three of the dead had been in a minibus,

one in a truck and one in a car. It was not clear how he knew these details.

Meanwhile, one US soldier was killed and five others wounded when a roadside bomb exploded in the path of a convoy in western Baghdad yesterday, the US military said.

A large truck was also damaged in the blast, it said in a statement, adding that the injured soldiers were evacuated for treatment.

The blast was one of at least five roadside bombs targeting US military convoys in Baghdad and the restive city of Ramadi, to the west of the capital, although there were no casualties caused by the other attacks.



PHOTO: AFP
Myanmar's army strongman General Than Shwe (C) shakes hands with India's Prime Minister Manmohan Singh (L) and Indian President Abdul Kalam (R) yesterday during a welcoming ceremony at the Presidential Palace in New Delhi. General Than Shwe met Indian premier Singh, leader of the world's biggest democracy, in New Delhi as the neighbouring nations sought stronger ties.

380 tons of explosives missing from Iraqi atomic site: IAEA

REUTERS, Vienna

Nearly 380 tons of explosives are missing from a site near Baghdad that was part of Saddam Hussein's dismantled atom bomb programme but was never secured by the US military, the United Nations said yesterday.

The head of the UN's nuclear watchdog, Mohamed ElBaradei, will immediately report the matter to the UN Security Council, a spokeswoman for the agency said.

The missing explosives could potentially be used to detonate a nuclear weapon or in conventional weapons, the agency said.

"ElBaradei has decided to inform the Security Council today," spokeswoman Melissa Fleming said.

The New York Times, which broke the story Monday, said US weapons experts feared the explosives could be used in bombing attacks against US or Iraqi forces,

which have come under increasing fire ahead of Iraq's elections due in January.

The UN's International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has been barred from most of Iraq since the war and has watched from afar as its former nuclear sites have been systematically stripped by looters.

Fleming said ElBaradei informed Washington of the seriousness of the matter on Oct. 15 after learning about the disappearance of the explosives on Oct. 10.

One substance found in large quantities at the al-Qaqaa facility was the explosive HMX, which Fleming said had "a potential use in a nuclear explosive device as a detonator."

Prior to the March 2003 invasion of Iraq, the HMX had been sealed and tagged with the IAEA emblem while being stored at al-Qaqaa.

Iran hints at agreeing to enrichment freeze

REUTERS, Tehran

Iran's top security official yesterday suggested Tehran may agree to extend its freeze on uranium enrichment but warned it could not be forced to scrap its nuclear technology for good.

The EU's "Big Three" powers, Britain, France and Germany, have offered Iran a deal in which Tehran would indefinitely suspend nuclear fuel cycle activities in return for EU help with civilian nuclear technology and a resumption of trade talks.

The freeze on enrichment activities -- which can be used to make bomb-grade material -- must happen before the International Atomic Energy Agency on Nov. 25 or the EU

would join Washington in seeking to send Iran's case to the UN Security Council.

Iranian officials Sunday rejected the EU proposal as unbalanced, but also said they wanted further negotiations.

But in a sign Tehran may agree to the original EU offer, Hassan Rohani, secretary-general of Iran's Supreme National Security Council, said an "indefinite" freeze did not mean the same thing as a "permanent" halt to enrichment.

"The Europeans say indefinite because Iran and Europe are supposed to hold negotiations for a long time," he told reporters after a meeting with parliament's National Security and Foreign Policy Commission

Pak PM to visit India next month

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistani Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz will visit India and other South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (Saarc) nations next month, the foreign office said yesterday.

It will be Aziz's first visit to India since his election as prime minister in August and follows a thaw in relations.

"Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz will go to India and other Saarc countries as Saarc chairman," spokesman Masood Khan Khan said in a weekly press briefing.

The two countries have agreed on the visit but a date has not yet been announced, he said.

Indian top brass meet to revamp war doctrine

AFP, New Delhi

Indian commanders went into a huddle yesterday to cobble together a new war doctrine which is likely to recommend the handover of control of nuclear-capable missiles to the military and call for an expensive upgrade of the navy, an official said.

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh is scheduled to address the Combined Services Commanders' Conference today while Defence Minister Pranab Mukherjee will wind up the annual session on Friday, the official said.

"The changing scenario in India's neighbourhood and international issues such as the conflict in Iraq and rising fuel prices will be part of

the discussions," the senior defence ministry official told AFP.

He said issues such as the induction of a newly-purchased Russian aircraft carrier and the refurbishment of some of the ageing fleet of the 137-ship Indian navy would be on the agenda.

The fine-tuned war doctrine is also likely to deal with the formation of smaller strike groups, modern measures to battle insurgencies and the modernisation of the infantry, artillery and armoured forces.

"The speedy induction (into the military) of nuclear-capable short and medium range missiles is very much on the agenda," the official said as the five-day brainstorming session began in the Indian capital.

India, Myanmar ink 3 accords

AFP, New Delhi

India, the world's largest democracy, gave a red carpet welcome yesterday to Myanmar's army leader General Than Shwe as hundreds of pro-democracy opponents of his military junta vented their anger over his visit.

No details were given about the talks between Singh and the general. But the two sides signed three accords including one on security issues. They also agreed to step up cooperation in trade, economic and other key areas.

The general arrived Sunday accompanied by a cabinet delegation whose portfolios include industry, energy and communications. His six-day trip is the first to India in 24 years by a head of state of the secretive country formerly known as Burma, which has been under military rule since 1962.



PHOTO: AFP
Investigators and employees of railway company inspect the Shinkansen bullet train derailed by a strong earthquake in Nagasaki on Oct 23 in Niigata Prefecture. A series of powerful earthquakes including an initial tremor measuring 6.8 on the Richter scale, left 25 people dead and injured more than 1,200.

Israel to face catastrophe if Gaza pullout fails: Peres

AFP, Jerusalem

Opposition leader Shimon Peres warned yesterday Israel would face a catastrophe if the pullout from Gaza is blocked, saying a continued presence in the territory ran counter to national security.

Speaking hours before a crunch parliamentary debate on Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's disengagement plan, Labour party leader Peres also predicted the premier would either have to forge a new coalition or call elections in days.

"What is happening today is massively important. If it fails it's a catastrophe," he told foreign journalists in Jerusalem.

Peres said that the current massive military presence in Gaza, which is currently home to around 8,000 Jewish settlers, was unsustainable.

"We have two military people for every settler. The Israeli people and

economy have to pay for that. It's an unreasonable and impossible situation for us and the Palestinians."

The Nobel peace prize-winning former prime minister said the demographic trend -- which could see the Arab population of Israel and the Palestinian territories overtake that of the Jews in a decade -- had led Sharon to "begin to realise that we have to answer very serious questions."

Peres said while he expected Palestinian militants to continue rocket attacks on Israel from Gaza in the immediate aftermath, a pullout would help "drain a swamp made of desperation."

"I believe that once we should leave Gaza the security situation will be improved, not declined," he added.

Labour has agreed to back the

government in a vote on disengagement on Tuesday -- virtually guaranteeing victory for Sharon -- but the current government's minority status is unsustainable in the long run.

Meanwhile, Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon vowed to see his controversial disengagement plan through to the end Monday as he told MPs he was convinced a withdrawal from the Gaza Strip would strengthen the nation.

"I have decided to go right through to the end with this separation. I am convinced this separation will strengthen Israel," he told MPs at the start of a two-day debate on the project.

"It will advance us on the road to peace with our neighbours the Palestinians," he added in his speech to parliament, which will vote on the plan on Tuesday evening.

Clinton to woo voters for Kerry

BBC ONLINE

Former US president Bill Clinton will aim to boost Democratic contender John Kerry's White House bid by addressing a gathering in Pennsylvania on Monday.

Clinton has spent the past two months recovering from heart surgery.

With just over a week left till polling day, neither Kerry nor his rival George W Bush have a clear lead.

Clinton's appearance alongside Kerry will appeal to some undecided voters and African-Americans, says the BBC's Justin Webb in Washington DC.

The former president told ABC television on Sunday he was taking to the stage for the Kerry campaign - despite having been operated on less than two months ago - because "the differences between the two candidates and the courses they will pursue in the next four years are so profound."

US ELECTION 2004

Kerry ridicules Bush on terrorism remark

AP, Fort Lauderdale

President Bush and Sen. John Kerry stayed on the offensive in swing states Sunday as the presidential race entered its final full week. In a television interview, Bush said it is "up in the air" whether the nation can ever be fully safe from another terror attack and suggested terrorists may still be contemplating ways to disrupt the election.

Kerry ridiculed Bush's statement, suggesting it echoed an earlier assertion later withdrawn by the president that the war on terror could not be won.

"You make me president of the United States, we're going to win the war on terror," Kerry said at an evening rally in Boca Raton, Fla. "It's not going to be up in the air whether or not we make America safe."

Earlier, Kerry spoke at a predominantly black church for the fourth consecutive Sunday, this one in Fort Lauderdale in heavily Democratic Broward County, and promised worshippers their votes would be counted this time. The county saw some of the worst of Florida's 2000 vote-counting abuses. "I want you to turn out," the Democrat said.

Kerry pressed his attack on the president's record in new television ads, while on the campaign trail he sought to strike a more inspirational tone, saying in a speech on faith that values he practices as a Roman Catholic "will guide me as president."

The Democrat took on church bishops who have criticized his support for abortion rights and expanded embryonic stem cell research and who have said he should be denied Holy Communion

for not advancing church teachings. "I love my church, I respect the bishops, but I respectfully disagree," Kerry said.

With polls showing the race still tight, the campaigns were focusing their efforts on fewer than a dozen states that remain highly competitive, with both camps making last-minute scheduling decisions to reflect realities on the ground.

Kerry was headed to New Hampshire after Florida. Bush won both states in 2000. The Republican incumbent campaigned in New Mexico, which Democrat Al Gore narrowly won. Speaking at a high school stadium in Alamogordo, Bush cited his differences with Kerry over Iraq.

On a day when Jordanian-born terrorist Abu Musab al-Zarqawi's group claimed responsibility for ambushing and killing 50 US-trained Iraqi soldiers, Bush declared: "Our troops will defeat Zarqawi and his likes overseas in Iraq so we do not have to face them here at home."



PHOTO: AFP
Pakistani school children stand in front of a cut-out of US presidential candidate Senator John Kerry during a demonstration in Islamabad yesterday. More than a thousand school children took part in the demonstration organised by the World Minorities Alliance NGO to show support for Kerry.