

Nov deadliest month for US troops in Iraq

Car bomb kills 7 while GI, 4 Iraqis killed in attacks, 40 drown in boat accident

AFP, REUTERS, Baghdad

A US soldier and four Iraqi civilians died in a spate of attacks yesterday, capping one of the deadliest months since the war and setting a bloody backdrop for efforts to keep landmark polls on schedule.

In Baiji, a car bomb exploded in a crowded market in a town north of Baghdad yesterday, killing at least seven people and wounding 20, underlining Iraq's severe security problems with elections just two months away.

The bomb went off in a busy staging area in the oil-refining town of Baiji, 200km north of Baghdad, as a US military patrol was passing. The blast destroyed market stalls and caused panic among the throng of shoppers, witnesses said.

A doctor at Baiji hospital, Samir Mehdi, said he had received seven

dead civilians from the blast and 18 wounded, including a child. A US military spokesman said two US soldiers were also wounded.

Meanwhile, up to 40 people were swept away and drowned as they tried to cross a swollen river in the far north of Iraq yesterday, families of the victims said.

Dozens of people were packed onto a flat barge boat, trying to cross a tributary of the Tigris river, when a rush of water swept down the river and overturned the barge, witnesses told a reporter for Reuters at the scene. The accident occurred near the town of Zaku, on Iraq's border with Turkey, about 300 miles north of Baghdad.

In a separate attack in the town, an insurgent fired a rocket-propelled grenade at a US tank, wounding a US soldier and damaging the tank, the spokesman

said.

Prime Minister Iyad Allawi, who has insisted that the US-led onslaught on the former rebel bastion of Fallujah had curbed violence, was expected to travel to Jordan to try to win support from exiled opposition leaders for the elections.

As well as near daily attacks on Iraqi security forces and civilians, November has been one of the deadliest months for US troops, with 134 killed. The highest death toll was in April this year, when 135 soldiers and Marines were killed.

The toll is one shy of the record of April 2004, when US forces were also facing insurgents on several fronts, including Fallujah. According to Pentagon figures, the latest death brought to 1,251 the total number of US troops killed in Iraq since the start of the war in March last year.



Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh (L) witnesses his Laoian counterpart and host Bounnhang Vorachith signing documents during a signing ceremony at the 10th Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) summit in Vientiane yesterday. Singh and 10 Asean members signed a blueprint that will guide political, social and economic relations.

India signs partnership pact with Asean states

Russia inks non-aggression pact

PTI, AFP, Vientiane

Heralding a new era in their relations, India and 10 Asean countries yesterday signed a historic partnership pact for peace, progress and shared prosperity and pledged to cooperate in fighting international terrorism and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

The 'Asean-India Partnership for Peace, Progress and Shared Prosperity' agreement inked by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and leaders of Asean countries during their 3rd annual summit here outlines a multi-pronged action plan for boosting trade, investment, tourism, culture, sports and people to people contacts.

The leaders agreed to intensify efforts to combat international terrorism and other transnational crimes like drug trafficking, arms

smuggling, human trafficking, particularly of women and children, sea piracy and money laundering.

The powerful Asean grouping comprises Laos, Malaysia, Cambodia, Indonesia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam and Brunei. India along with China and other key countries are the dialogue partners of the grouping.

Meanwhile, Russia signed a non-aggression pact with a group of 10 Southeast Asians Monday, becoming the seventh country outside of the region to join the treaty.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov signed the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) Treaty of Amity and Cooperation at a meeting with the leaders of the group in the Laoian capital Vientiane.

Musharraf foresees peace with India

AFP, Brasilia

Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf heads to Sao Paulo to meet with Brazilian business leaders yesterday, on the last day of his visit to Latin America's biggest and richest country.

Musharraf was due to visit Embraer, the world's fourth largest civil aircraft manufacturer, after holding talks Monday in the capital with Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva.

The two countries signed several agreements on drug trafficking and visa issues, while the Pakistani leader voiced optimism in peace talks with neighbor and nuclear rival India.

"We have initiated a process of rapprochement with India and we look forward to a peaceful coexistence with India in the region, through confidence-building measures and through the resolution of all disputes," Musharraf said Monday.

"May I say, I see a light at the end

of the tunnel, now ... the process of rapprochement has started," the general said.

Pakistan and India have fought two of their three wars over the disputed territory of Kashmir, but in April last year then-Indian prime minister Atal Behari Vajpayee started the current peace process by offering a "hand of friendship" to Pakistan.

However, Musharraf went on to say -- as he departed a lunch with Lula -- that the peace bid "needs two hands to clap."

"So my hand is there, I hope the other hand will also be there and then we will be able to reach peace. But peace by resolving all disputes, which includes the dispute of Kashmir."

Earlier Monday, the two nuclear rivals agreed new dates for a meeting between their top foreign ministry officials to review progress on the peace process, according to an Islamabad-based foreign ministry official.

Fresh Ukraine polls seems likely

Kuchma backs idea as court, parliament resume session

REUTERS, Kiev

Some form of new election in Ukraine appeared increasingly likely as the Supreme Court and parliament both sit yesterday to try to resolve a week-long crisis triggered by a disputed presidential poll.

Outgoing President Leonid Kuchma signaled a shift in position Monday, backing a new election to resolve a standoff that threatens to tear the nation apart.

With mass protests paralysing government, Finance Minister Mykola Azarov said the banking system was strong enough to weather the chaos but the central bank warned there was a run on bank deposits. It pledged to meet increased cash demands.

Supporters of challenger Viktor Yushchenko again began gathering in the center of the capital Kiev, white after heavy overnight snowfalls. Their early morning numbers appeared smaller than in previous days, but the barricades blocking the main thoroughfare remained intact.

While the Supreme Court meets for a second day to consider electoral fraud allegations by Yushchenko, parliament will discuss the state of the economy and demands in eastern regions for autonomy.

Buoyed by international pressure, tens of thousands of Yushchenko's supporters surged through central Kiev last week to back his Supreme Court challenge against authorities declaring Prime

Minister Viktor Yanukovich winner of the Nov. 21 ballot.

Angry demonstrators in eastern Ukraine, the prime minister's home base which sees its future linked to Russia, denounced efforts to overturn the official result.

Kuchma's comments marked a concession to Yushchenko, whom he had previously criticized for whipping up mass street protests with charges that he was cheated of the presidency by fraud.

"If we really want to preserve peace and consensus and build this just democratic society, of which we speak so much but have failed to carry out in a legal way, let us have new elections," Kuchma told regional leaders, with Yanukovich present.



Residents from Banugaw village climb down using a rope to cross a fallen concrete bridge in the eastern Philippine town of General Nakar yesterday. The bridge was knocked down by the floating logs brought down by the floods panned by a storm that hit the eastern part of the Philippines. The death toll from the storm has risen above 150 as the towns of General Nakar, Infanta and Real are isolated by the toppling of their bridges.

RED CROSS SAYS Guantanamo Bay tactics 'tantamount to torture'

REUTERS, Washington

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has accused the US military of using tactics "tantamount to torture" on prisoners at the US Navy base in Guantanamo Bay. The New York Times reported yesterday.

An ICRC inspection team that spent most of June at Guantanamo Bay reported the use of psychological and sometimes physical coercion on the prisoners, the newspaper said.

It said it had recently obtained a memorandum that quoted the report in detail and listed its major findings.

In Geneva, the ICRC said it would neither confirm nor deny the New York Times report -- in which allegations of treatment tantamount to torture go further than what the neutral intermediary has publicly stated before about inmates held at Guantanamo.

But, in a statement, the Geneva-based ICRC said it remained concerned that "significant problems regarding conditions and treatment at Guantanamo Bay have not yet been adequately addressed," and it was pursuing talks with US authori-

ties. More than 500 people are being held at the US base in Cuba, detained during the 2001 US war to oust al Qaeda and the ruling Taliban from Afghanistan and in other operations in the US war against terror. The ICRC began visits in early 2002.

The Times said the US government and military officials received the ICRC report in July and rejected its findings.

Asked by the Times about the report, a Pentagon spokesman said in a statement: "The United States operates a safe, humane and professional detention operation at Guantanamo that is providing valuable information in the war on terrorism."

The Times said the Red Cross investigators had found a system devised to break the will of prisoners through "humiliating acts, solitary confinement, temperature extremes, use of forced positions."

"The construction of such a system, whose stated purpose is the production of intelligence, cannot be considered other than an intentional system of cruel, unusual and degrading treatment and a form of torture," the Times quoted the report as saying.

Chopper crashes in US: 7 American soldiers killed

AP, Brucetonville-Eddy, Texas

An Army helicopter carrying a brigadier general and six other soldiers crashed and burned in the fog Monday after hitting a web of support wires on a TV transmission tower whose warning lights had been knocked out in a storm last week, officials said. Everyone aboard was killed.

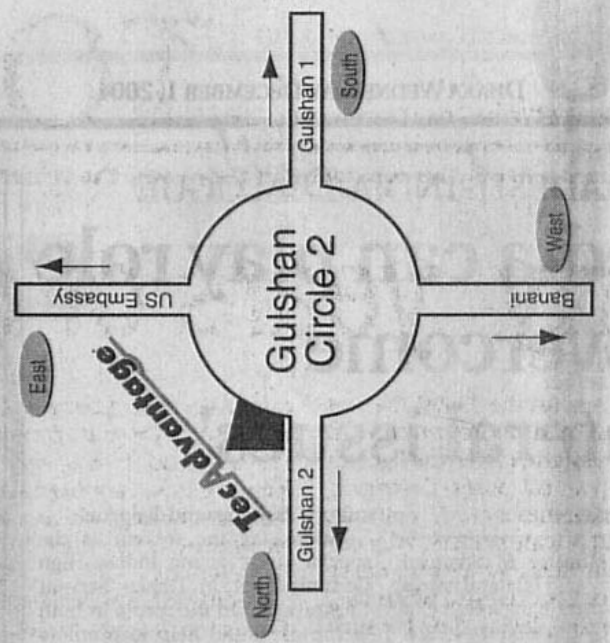
The UH-60 Black Hawk, bound for the Red River Army Depot in Texarkana, went down in a field about 30 miles northeast of Fort Hood. The fog was so thick when emergency crews arrived that they could not see more than halfway up the tower, authorities said. The helicopter was headed to check out equipment being readied for use in Iraq, said Lt. Col. Jonathan Withington, spokesman for the Fort Hood-based 4th Infantry Division. The names of the victims, all from Fort Hood, were not immediately released by the military.

A military official at the home of Brig. Gen. Charles B. Allen told The Associated Press that Allen was among those killed. In his 27-year career, Allen, an assistant division commander for the 4th Infantry Division, was stationed at several US and overseas military posts and also worked at the Pentagon.



In this picture taken on November 28 in Madras, Aids-infected children play in an orphanage for HIV-positive children run by the Indian NGO Community Health Education Society (CHES). According to a report released yesterday on the eve of the World's Aids Day, India already has the world's second highest number of people affected with HIV/Aids after South Africa.

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