



PHOTO: AFP
This photograph entered into evidence on January 18 at the Court Martial of three soldiers from the Royal Regiment of Fusiliers in Osnabrueck, Germany, shows Lance corporal Darren Larkin standing on an Iraqi detainee and corporal Daniel Kenyon taking a photograph in the rear. Three British soldiers were jailed Friday for abusing Iraqi civilians in a case that has drawn comparisons with US mistreatment of prisoners at Abu Ghraib prison.

UK jails 3 soldiers for Iraqi prison abuse

British army chief apologises

REUTERS, Osnabrueck

Britain jailed three soldiers on Friday for abusing Iraqi detainees, but faced questions over why it failed to punish anyone for forcing prisoners to simulate sex acts in photos that echoed Abu Ghraib. The chief of Britain's army, General Sir Mike Jackson, apologised to the victims and the Iraqi people, and announced an inquiry into lessons that could be learned. A newspaper embarrassed the authorities by locating victims that prosecutors had failed to find in a 20-month probe. Without the victims' testimony, prosecutors were unable to convict anyone for staging the sex abuse which soldiers photographed during a crackdown on looters in Basra in May 2003.

Prisoners in the photos were stripped naked and forced to simulate anal and oral sex, mirroring notorious pictures of abuse taken by US troops at the Abu Ghraib jail. "When you abused the power that you had over them as you did, you cannot expect much leniency," Judge Advocate Michael Hunter told the men. "What you have done is so serious that we would be failing in our duties if we did not impose substantial sentences and dismiss you all (from the army) with disgrace." Daniel Kenyon was given an 18-month sentence for failing to report the sex abuse and two other charges. Mark Cooley was given two years for charges including suspending a trussed-up Iraqi from the prongs of a forklift truck. Darren Larkin was given five months for stomping on a bound man.

Maoists raid Nepali TV station

Dozens of rebels killed in clashes

AFP, Kathmandu

At least three dozen Maoist rebels in Nepal were reported killed in clashes as guerrillas raided a TV station in the latest violence to shake the kingdom since King Gyanendra seized power, officials said yesterday. The announcement of the violence came as a transport blockade called by the rebels to protest the king's power grab entered its 14th day with armed soldiers escorting supply trucks and passengers buses in and out of the ancient capital. "At least three dozen Maoists are believed to have been killed in fierce clashes with the security forces," said a statement from the army's

western divisional headquarters. It was not possible to independently verify the report due to the remoteness of the location. Rebels routinely take away the bodies to avoid their identification and their network being uncovered. The clashes occurred Thursday and Friday in the rebel-dominated far-flung western Kailali district between Thursday and Friday. They were sparked when about 400 rebels attacked forces in the village of Hasulia, the army said. Three soldiers and a policeman died in a separate clash in Pathariya in far western Nepal Friday. Injured soldiers were airlifted to Kathmandu for treatment, the statement added. It did not say how many troops were hurt.

King Gyanendra declared emergency rule -- including press censorship -- and sacked the government February 1 for what he said was its failure to deal with the Maoist insurgency. He has offered unconditional peace talks with the rebels, who have denounced him as the "great betrayer." In other violence, hundreds of suspected Maoist rebels attacked a state-run Nepalese TV station in the remote southwest, forcing the outlet to suspend broadcasting, said a security official who wished to remain unnamed. The rebels stormed the Nepal Television station at Kohalpur near Nepalgunj town late Thursday and set fire to its offices, he said.

Manila strikes 'truce' with Moro rebels

AFP, Jolo

The Philippines military reached an informal truce with a Muslim rebel group, allowing troops to concentrate on pursuing al-Qaeda-linked Abu Sayyaf extremists, an official said yesterday. Ben Loong, the governor of southern Jolo island, told government officials he helped broker the agreement with Muslim leader Habier Malik, who led Moro National Liberation Front forces in an uprising on Jolo earlier this month. "We cannot say it's a ceasefire but we call it a gentleman's talk between the armed forces and the MNLF," Loong said. Malik, a loyal follower of jailed MNLF founder Nur Misuari, led about 300 MNLF fighters supported by the Abu Sayyaf in attacks on military outposts in Jolo on February 6, triggering fighting that claimed the lives of 25 soldiers and about 70 rebels. More than 27,000 people fled their homes due to the clashes. Although Malik's base in the jungles outside Panamao town had been captured and his forces dispersed, the fugitive religious leader remains in hiding with many of his armed followers still at large.

Mubarak calls for direct presidential election

AFP, Cairo

President Hosni Mubarak said yesterday he had told parliament to amend Egypt's constitution to allow direct presidential elections in which anyone can stand and all citizens can vote by secret ballot. The announcement comes amid US pressure on Egypt to accelerate democratic reform and follows months of unprecedented protests in which demonstrators have denounced the likelihood of Mubarak being elected to a fifth six-year term. In a televised speech, Mubarak hailed what he called an "historic" move signalling a new era of political reform. He said he had asked the constitution to be amended before May in time for the next presidential election. "I took this initiative to open a new era of reform," said the 76-year-old Mubarak who has ruled Egypt since his predecessor was assassinated in 1981.

6 killed in Iraq violence

11 people kidnapped, top Zarqawi aide captured

AFP, REUTERS, Baghdad

At least two people were killed yesterday when a bomb exploded near the headquarters of Iraq's leading Sunni Muslim religious organisation, as four others died in attacks elsewhere and a number of Iraqis were reported snatched in a spate of kidnappings. The violence rumbled on a day after four US soldiers and 13 Iraqis were killed and three British soldiers jailed for abusing Iraqi civilians. The Iraqi government said on Friday it had captured a senior aide to Zarqawi, Abu Qutaybah, close to the border with Syria, and has vowed to get Zarqawi himself. "We are at the closest point to Zarqawi," Iraq's minister of state for national security, Kassim Daoud, said on Saturday. Troops in tanks and armored cars stormed Haditha in the middle of the night, blowing up a weapons cache and exchanging small arms fire with guerrillas. But if militants were holed up there they appeared

to have fled and resistance was light. It also came as the Islamic extremist network led by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the al-Qaeda superman in Iraq and one of the world's most-wanted men, was banned under Australia's counter-terrorism laws. Zarqawi's group has claimed responsibility for bombings, kidnappings and murders in Iraq, including the recent bombing of the Australian embassy in which two Iraqis were killed and two Australian soldiers wounded. A group linked to Zarqawi claimed responsibility for an attack Friday that killed three of the US soldiers. Amid the daily diet of ambushes and bombings, a US general has ruled out a timeline for a full transfer of security to Iraqi security as the political bargaining for a new government, premier and president lumbered on. Two people were killed and two wounded in Baghdad when a bomb went off as a car passed near the

Umm al-Qura mosque, headquarters of the Committee of Muslim Scholars, which groups Iraq's senior Sunni clerics, said witnesses and medics. Three Iraqi women died when mortar rounds struck homes in the area around Dhuluiyah, said security sources. Meanwhile, police said 11 people, including four women, a policeman and two civil servants, have been kidnapped in a string of abductions since Friday in the same area south of Baghdad, known as the "triangle of death". Gunmen snatched the four women in four separate incidents in the towns of Latifiyah and Mahmudiyah on Friday. Two of them had been travelling back with their families from pilgrimage to the Shiite Muslim holy city of Karbala when they were ambushed on the road. In Germany, three British soldiers were jailed Friday for abusing Iraqi civilians and were dishonourably discharged from the army.



PHOTO: AFP
An Iraqi worker looks yesterday at fire raging from a sabotaged oil pipeline at al-Dibs oil field south of the northern Iraqi city of Kirkuk. Insurgent attacks against scores of pipelines have cost Iraq between seven and eight billion dollars in lost revenues since the US-led invasion of March 2003, according to oil ministry estimates.

India, Indonesia sign anti-terror accord

THE STATESMAN/ ANN, New Delhi

India and Indonesia today agreed to reinforce cooperation in combating terrorism through exchange of information and intelligence, capacity building and mutual legal cooperation. This was decided at the first meeting of the India-Indonesia joint working group on Counter Terrorism. It was held back to back with the second meeting of the India-Indonesia joint commission. The meeting was held within the framework of the Memorandum of Understanding on Combating International Terrorism signed between India and Indonesia on 2 July 2004. The Indian delegation was led by additional secretary, ministry of external affairs, Ms Meera Shankar and the Indonesian delegation was led by Ambassador Rhoosdy Surjaatmadja of the Department of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia.

Thaksin to go tough against militants

AFP, Bangkok

Four more people have been killed in surging violence in Thailand's Muslim south, as Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra yesterday defended his hard-line policies and accused his critics of sympathising with separatist rebels. Three men were shot dead early Saturday, while a fourth was stabbed to death late Friday in three southern provinces near the Malaysian border, police said. Police blamed the four killings, as well as a failed bombing targeted at a truckload of teachers, and a separate shooting injury, on the year-long Islamic separatist insurgency which has claimed more than 610 lives. As the violence raged early Saturday, Thaksin gave an unusually impassioned radio address defending his hard-line policies against critics who say his tactics are overly harsh and discriminatory. "It seems that all these critics are more concerned about the lives of separatist militants than of the innocent villagers who are killed every day, especially in the past week as the situation deteriorated with both killings and bombing," he said. "These militants are killing indiscriminately, not just Buddhist Thais or Muslim Thais. They would kill anyone if they had the chance," Thaksin said.

Charles' wedding set to end up in court

AFP, London

The planned marriage of Britain's Prince Charles to his longtime mistress Camilla Parker Bowles is set to end up in court to test its legality, a newspaper reported yesterday. The Daily Express said an investigation into the marriage is expected to be referred to family law judge Dame Elizabeth Butler-Sloss to test whether the civil wedding at Windsor Guildhall is legal. Other challenges have effectively put the April 8 ceremony on hold, it said. The register office service is overseeing the inquiry in which Butler-Sloss, president of the High Court family division, will be consulted informally by England's Registrar General Len Cook. Legal experts said that depending on the outcome of the discussion, the dispute may be referred to the court for a ruling, the newspaper reported. There is also a chance that any decision will be challenged in a High Court judicial review, threatening to delay the wedding, the Daily Express said.

Israel raids West Bank after suicide bombing

4 Israelis killed in blast

REUTERS, Tulkarm

Hours after a suicide bombing in Tel Aviv, Israeli troops yesterday launched their biggest raid into the West Bank since agreeing a ceasefire with the Palestinians this month and arrested two brothers. Villagers in Deir al-Ghoshon said soldiers told them the men were brothers of the suspected bomber who killed four Israelis outside a Tel Aviv night club on Friday and were also thought to have been involved. The army confirmed the raid but gave no further details. The bombing shattered a de facto truce by militants that has ensured several weeks of calm and reinforced hopes for peacemaking after Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas and Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon agreed a ceasefire on Feb 8. The Palestinian Authority vowed to track down those behind the bombing. Israel said Abbas had to crack down on militants instead of

just talking to the factions to try to get them to formalize the cease-fire. Responsibility for the bombing outside a popular karaoke night spot on Friday remained unclear. A cell of the militant Islamic Jihad group in the West Bank claimed the attack, but the faction's leadership in the Gaza Strip denied any knowledge and said it would continue to maintain calm. Villagers said at least 15 Israeli army military vehicles raided Deir al-Ghoshon, north of Tulkarm, and imposed a curfew before dawn. A military source said: "The action is now over and the curfew has been lifted." The bombing was the first since Nov. 1 and brought scenes of wailing ambulances and spattered blood that many Israelis had begun to believe that they had put behind them. Sharon was to meet senior security officials on Saturday to discuss the response. Israeli officials made clear that the Jewish state would "defend itself

against terror," but said whatever action was taken would be in line with the ceasefire understanding. They put the main onus to act on Abbas, who had until now been credited with delivering on his promise of calm. "The Palestinians have taken some important steps, but they have to complete the job. They cannot rely on agreements with terrorist organisations," said Raanan Gissin, Sharon's spokesman. Abbas's government said: "The Palestinian Authority will not be silent about this sabotage and it will pursue whoever stands behind this act and will inflict the required punishment." Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice demanded that Palestinian leaders find those responsible and "send a clear message that terror will not be tolerated." Washington has stepped up efforts to revive the peace process after Abbas was elected to succeed late President Yasser Arafat with a pledge of non-violence.

Beijing moves to expand cooperation with Taipei

THE CHINA DAILY/ ANN, Beijing

Beijing on Friday pledged to expand cross-Straits charter flights while offering greater access to agricultural products from Taiwan. The government also agreed to consider launching cargo charters to Taiwan and allow Taiwanese airlines to use the mainland's international flight routes to Europe. These economic offers came despite officials' warning of a "grave cross-Straits situation" at a regular press conference held by the Taiwan Affairs Office of the State Council. "We will exert our greatest efforts as long as these things benefit our Taiwan compatriots," said Li Weiyl, spokesman of the office. Tang Yi, deputy director of the office's Economic Bureau, pro-

posed talks on non-stop charter flights to cover more holidays or even regular charter flights between the two sides. "We hope airlines from both sides of the Straits can reach a consensus on launching charter flights for the Qingming Festival and other traditional Chinese festivals as soon as possible," he told reporters. "We also hope that charter flights can be operated in all major holidays and regular passenger flights can be run to link main mainland areas, where Taiwanese business people live, with major cities on the island." The Qingming Festival, or Tomb Sweeping Day, which falls on April 5, is a traditional holiday when people of Chinese ancestry cherish the memory of the dead or worship their forefathers. The call by the mainland followed

48 successful non-stop round-trip charter flights across the Straits between January 29 and February 20 during the Chinese Lunar New Year. Twelve mainland and Taiwanese airlines participated in the historic programme - a first in 56 years - and carried 10,771 mainland-based Taiwan business people and their families. For decades, Taipei has maintained a ban on direct transport links with the mainland. Tang stressed that passengers for future charter flights should not be confined only to Taiwan business people and their families, but include all people with legal permits. Beijing is also ready to discuss the establishment of cross-Straits cargo charter services with Taiwanese airline associations, he said.

Pakistan not bothered by India acquiring Patriot: Musharraf

PTI, REUTERS, Islamabad

Shrugging off the reported US move to sell Patriot missile defence systems to India, President Pervez Musharraf has said Pakistan is not "bothered" by this as it has drawn up plans for next 15 years to maintain deterrence and get necessary weapons to match that of its neighbour's. "We formed our own 15-year development strategy. We will never lose this effect of our strategy of defensive deterrence in the development of armed forces. So we are not bothered. I know in the future we will maintain the strategic deterrence strategy," he said. Musharraf's remarks contradict Pakistan Foreign Office spokesman Masood Khan's statement earlier this week that Islamabad has "taken up" its concerns about

the proposed sale of Patriot defence missile systems to India, both with Washington and New Delhi as it would be "counter-productive" and send the region into "crisis mode." The General said Pakistan has assessed the threat perceptions from "all quarters" for the 15 years and prepared plans accordingly. "We have strategised what we need to get. We will get them." Meanwhile, Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf said he would not nominate a successor and said the potential sale of a US anti-missile system to India was not a cause for alarm. Musharraf, who has survived two al-Qaeda inspired assassination attempts, said on Thursday Pakistan's next leader would be chosen by its people and the National Assembly.



PHOTO: AFP
Yakin Ertuk, Special Rapporteur of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights on violence against women, gives a press conference on Friday in Mexico City. Ertuk is in Mexico after the NGO "Madres en busca de Justicia" (Mothers searching for Justice), made up of relatives of women murdered in Ciudad Juarez, north Mexico, asked the UN intercession in the case.

Iran, Russia delay signing of nuke fuel deal

AFP, Tehran

Russia and Iran yesterday delayed the scheduled signing of a landmark nuclear fuel supply deal that will launch the Islamic republic's first atomic power station, with an Iranian official saying negotiations were "dragging on". Russia's top atomic energy official Alexander Rumyantsev and his Iranian counterpart Gholamreza Aghazadeh had been due to sign off on the contract in the morning and then hold a joint news conference. But the spokesman for Iran's Atomic Energy Organisation, Yaghoob Jabarian, told reporters that the deal had not been signed and the news conference postponed. "The negotiations are dragging on. We do not know when they will conclude," he said, adding a press conference will "maybe" take place on Sunday. No further details were given.