

Man attacked Saddam in court: Lawyers

REUTERS, Amman

Former Iraqi President Saddam Hussein was attacked by an unidentified man during his appearance at a court hearing in Baghdad on Thursday, his defense team said on Saturday.

The team, which has an office in the Jordanian capital Amman, said in a statement that the man attacked Saddam and the two exchanged blows during a hearing attended by defense lawyer Khalil Dulaimi.

"As the president stood to leave the courtroom one of those present attacked him and there was an exchange of blows between the man and the president," the statement said.

The head of the tribunal did nothing to stop the assault, the statement alleged.

It did not say if Saddam was hurt.

The Iraqi Special Tribunal trying Saddam on Friday released photographs of the toppled leader being questioned on the suppression of Kurdish and Shi'ite uprisings in 1991.



PHOTO: AFP

An injured mother sits on a hospital trolley as her daughter cries at the Abu Nafis hospital yesterday. At least five people were killed when a suicide car bomber attempted to ram a police patrol near the national theatre in the centre of Baghdad, police said. Another 25 people were wounded.

Two Britons killed in southern Iraq

US checkpoints try to halt rebel passage into Fallujah

AFP, Basra

Two British civilians were killed and two Iraqi children wounded Saturday when a bomb blew up near a convoy of four-wheel drive vehicles southwest of Basra in southern Iraq, a British army officer told AFP.

It was not immediately known who the victims were, but another British military spokesman said "no British forces were involved in the incident".

The British embassy in Baghdad said it was aware of "an incident" that was being investigated.

"The blast occurred at about 1100 am (0700 GMT), damaging two cars in the convoy and killing two Britons, while two Iraqi children were wounded," the officer said.

Initial reports suggested the

explosion took place near an oil pipeline.

US and Iraqi security forces have virtually sealed off the former rebel bastion of Fallujah, but insurgents continue to stage hit-and-run attacks in this Sunni stronghold, according to a top US marine.

"Fallujah remains fatal as insurgents continue to carry out attacks against security forces," Lieutenant-Colonel Joseph L'Etoile, commanding officer of the US marines in southern Fallujah, told AFP.

Fierce fighting between insurgents and US-led forces has killed hundreds of rebels in the flashpoint town of Fallujah, 50 kilometres west of Baghdad, where four US contractors in March 2004 were brutally murdered, their bodies burned and dragged through the streets by cheering mobs.

US forces recaptured Fallujah in November following a major offensive, but this remains "a symbolic town for insurgents and any successful attack sends a strong message across Iraq," L'Etoile said.

The attacks are largely in the form of improvised bombs, small arms fire on patrols, and the occasional throwing of grenades.

Last week, two soldiers died and one was wounded when rebels attacked an Iraqi army patrol with a grenade and a bomb, L'Etoile said.

"What was significant was that insurgents exposed themselves in broad daylight and carried out the attack," he added.

L'Etoile said that despite these incidents, Fallujah was returning to normal, but he still feared outside elements could damage peace in the city.

KASHMIR VIOLENCE

Militants killed as clash with troops ends

AFP, Srinagar

Two militants who fought a day-long gunbattle with security forces were killed Saturday ending an intense clash in the heart of Indian Kashmir's summer capital Srinagar, police said.

The fighting, which started Friday afternoon, has also left two security force personnel dead and 21 others injured -- seven news cameramen and photographers, six security force personnel and eight civilians.

"One of the cameramen is critical," a doctor at the main hospital in Srinagar said.

"We have killed both the militants who had barricaded themselves inside a hotel and a shopping complex," a spokesman for Border Security Force, Manhas, who uses one name, told reporters.

Firing had intensified early Saturday around dawn when troops targeted the two buildings where

they suspected the militants were hiding out.

The fighting took place near Srinagar's Lal Chowk -- Indian Kashmir's main commercial hub -- and the scene of many such clashes in a separatist conflict that has claimed more than 44,000 lives since 1989.

"Both sides were exchanging fire and grenades," a police officer said.

The clashes broke out when the militants attacked a paramilitary bunker with rifle fire and a grenade, sparking panic.

The militants later barricaded themselves inside a shopping complex and a hotel, and exchanged constant heavy fire throughout the night with security forces.

"The fighting is over but we are searching the area for possible hiding militants," Manhas said, adding one of the two militants' bodies was mutilated.

Indian jet skids off rain-soaked runway

AFP, Mumbai

An Air India plane carrying more than 300 passengers skidded off the runway in India's monsoon-lashed commercial hub of Mumbai Saturday, an airline spokesman said, adding that all passengers were safe.

Flight 127 from the southern city of Bangalore overshot the runway at Mumbai's international airport and got stranded in soft ground, spokesman Jitender Bhargava said.

The 333 passengers were all safe and the Boeing 747-400 plane later continued on as scheduled en route to Frankfurt and Chicago.

"After 90 minutes the aircraft was towed back to the runway and the airport is back to normal. Flights are taking off and landing," Bhargava said.

He attributed the incident to the unprecedented monsoon rains that have been lashing parts of India since the beginning of this week, leaving more than 900 people dead.

Women candidates defy election ban call in Pakistan

AFP, Peshawar

More than 300 women candidates have filed papers to stand in local elections in northwest Pakistan, defying a ban called by Islamic clerics in the conservative region, activists said Friday.

"Around 320 women filed their nomination papers in three districts where clerics had imposed a ban on their democratic and constitutional rights," said women's rights activist Aimal Khan.

"The figures are encouraging and give a new lease of life to the struggle for women's rights in this province," she told AFP.

"We want women to be in mainstream politics. Democracy is incomplete without their participation in the democratic exercise."

Islamic fundamentalist parties, joined by some secular groups, have opposed women's participation in next month's local government elections in the districts of Upper Dir, Lower Dir and Batagram.

They said allowing women to contest seats would violate local cultural norms in the deeply religious North West Frontier Province, a remote and mountainous region on the Afghan border.

Mumbai launches massive recovery operation

AFP, Mumbai

Workers began a massive cleanup and rescuers searched for survivors under mountains of debris in western India after record monsoon rains claimed 920 lives, officials said Saturday.

Soldiers, police and rescue workers used bulldozers, cranes and their bare hands to remove boulders and rubble from areas hit by landslides as 130,000 municipal workers set about repairing potholed roads, clogged drains and electricity and drinking water services.

R.S Pardeshi of the Police Control Room in Mumbai said the bodies of 37 people were recovered from the city overnight, taking the financial hub's death toll from the floods to 407 and that of Maharashtra state to around 920.

"The total death toll in the state,

including Mumbai city, is more than 900," said S. Jadhav, a senior police official with the Police Control Room.

State deputy chief minister R.R. Patil on Friday, however, put the toll at 696 but did not explain why his figures differed from those of the police.

In the southern Mumbai region of Konkan, Indian soldiers used their bare hands, spades and shovels to recover bodies and clear the debris in one of the worst-hit areas, Jui village.

Rescue workers were searching for more bodies in Kotiwala in western Mumbai where flash floods left more than 40 dead.

Mumbai received 944.2 millimeters (37.1 inches) of rainfall in a one-day period ending mid-morning Wednesday, the most rainfall ever recorded in a single day in India, which caused flash floods and

landslides in the city and outlying areas of the state.

Heavy rains accompanied by strong winds continued to lash the city Saturday and made recovery operations difficult.

Flights from Mumbai's airport, India's busiest, were suspended for several hours Saturday after an Air India Boeing 747 from the southern city of Bangalore skidded off a wet runway, officials said. None of the 333 passengers were hurt.

However Johny Joseph, the municipal commissioner of Mumbai, said he hoped the city would recover completely within a few days.

"This disaster is unprecedented in the history of Mumbai," Joseph told AFP. "The crisis worsened due to a combination of high tide, flooding and continuous rainfall. Rail and road traffic was disrupted totally and is almost restored now."

Arrested man confesses to bombings: Italian press

AFP, Rome

The man believed to be the fourth would-be bomber in the failed July 21 attacks said he and his accomplices wanted their attack to spread fear in London, in an apparent confession reported by Italian newspapers Saturday.

"We wanted to make an attack, but only as a demonstration," several newspapers quoted 27-year-old Osman Hussain as saying, without citing a source.

Italy's best-selling newspaper, the Corriere della Sera, expressed fears that the presence of one of the presumed London bombers could be linked to an planned attack here.

"Was he here just as part of his escape or to prepare a new attack?" it asked.

Rome daily Il Messaggero headlined: "The suicide bomber was among us," and reported that police believe Hussain could have been in Rome to prepare a terrorist attack.

Italian police moved in to arrest Hussain on Friday after tracking his

Manmohan, Pervez to meet at UNGA in New York

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh will meet Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf in New York in September this year on the sideline of the UN General Assembly session.

This was agreed to on Friday night when Musharraf spoke to Singh over telephone to express condolences on the large number of deaths and massive destruction caused by floods in the western state of Maharashtra including India's financial hub Mumbai.

During the 10-minute "cordial" telephonic conversation, the two leaders also took opportunity to discuss bilateral issues, the Indian Prime Minister Media Advisor Sanjaya Baru told reporters here.

The two leaders had met for the first time in September last year in New York also on the margin of the UN general assembly session. The previous interaction between them had taken place when Musharraf visited New Delhi in April this year during the Pakistan-India cricket series when cricket was mixed with diplomacy.



PHOTO: AFP

An Italian policeman shows the photo of Osman Hussain.

mobile phone through France and Italy before his arrival in Rome by train on Thursday.

British police had provided their Italian counterparts with the phone number, which was initially tracked to the Waterloo Station area of London on Monday.