

Iraq PM declares revised security plan for Baghdad

AFP, Baghdad

Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki on Saturday declared a revised security plan for Baghdad aimed at curbing the raging insurgent and sectarian violence in the Iraqi capital.

Maliki said the plan will offer more muscle to Iraqi forces who will be backed by US troops, but offered few details.

"The security plan will not protect any outlaws regardless of their sectarian or political affiliations," the prime minister said in a

speech marking the 86th anniversary of Iraqi army.

"We will hold accountable all those who neglect orders or work on political and sectarian basis."

The new plan will rely on Iraqi "armed forces to forcefully implement the plan and the coalition forces will support our forces," Maliki said.

"Local military commanders will be given all powers to execute the plan in the sector he supervises," Maliki said, suggesting that the commander need not await a decision from higher authorities to

take an immediate action.

"The plan will be in force until all missions are complete in a way that promotes security and provide services to people," he added.

A massive security plan, Operation Together Forward, has been in place since June 2006 in Baghdad to secure the capital, which is the epicentre of Iraq's insurgent and sectarian violence.

But despite the plan more than 100 people are killed daily in Baghdad, according to the United Nations.



Sylhet Division Development Action Council distributes winter clothes among underprivileged children at Muktangan in the city yesterday.

Nato-led soldiers injured in attacks in Afghanistan

AFP, Kabul

Bombings targeted at Nato troops in Afghanistan wounded a number of soldiers in the latest insurgency-linked unrest while gunmen shot dead an Afghan intelligence officer yesterday, officials said.

Winter has seen a scaling down in attacks linked to a Taliban-led insurgency, but there is still regular violence blamed on the militants who were driven from power in a US-led invasion in late 2001.

A suicide attacker exploded a bomb-filled car he was in near International Security Assistance Force soldiers in the eastern province of Paktika Friday, wounding a number of the troops, an ISAF spokesman said.

Major Dominic Whyte would not

confirm the provincial governor's report that four of the soldiers were hurt.

The 37-nation ISAF also does not release the nationalities of its casualties, leaving this to their home nation, but most of the soldiers in the east of the country are US nationals.

"It was a vehicle-borne suicide bomb," Whyte told AFP.

"A number of ISAF soldiers were wounded," he said without being able to immediately provide more details.

Governor Mohammad Akram Khepeltwak said the attacker, who struck in the volatile Barmal district that is on the border with Pakistan, detonated bombs in a pick-up truck as he approached an ISAF vehicle.

"Four Nato soldiers were

slightly wounded. The attack took place close to an Afghan army military post," he told AFP.

In another attack on the Nato-led foreign soldiers, a roadside bomb exploded and struck an ISAF convoy on Saturday in the southern province of Kandahar, the birthplace of the Taliban movement in the early 1990s, a spokesman said.

One soldier was slightly wounded, Captain Andre Saloum told AFP from the southern city of Kandahar.

The attack was in the Zahri area, not far from the city and was included in some of the most intense anti-Taliban action last year.

In the eastern province of Khost meanwhile an investigation chief in the provincial intelligence branch was shot dead on his way to work Saturday, the department's deputy director, Mirajan, said.

The officer, Mursal Mangal, was killed by gunmen on a motorbike, he said, adding that the motive appeared to have been criminal. Taliban-linked militants have been blamed for many similar assassinations.

The insurgency was its deadliest last year with 4,000 people said to have been killed in the violence, most of them insurgents.

The usual upsurge of violence in the spring in a few months time is expected to be at least as intense as it was last year.

US sanctions on arms dealers "illegal" Says Russia

AFP, Moscow

Russia hit back yesterday at the United States after Washington had imposed sanctions on three Russian firms for exporting weapons to Libya and Iran, branding the US action "illegal".

"The United States are not for the first time trying to extend their national laws illegally to foreign countries, forcing them to work according to American rules," the Russian foreign ministry said in a statement.

Washington announced sanctions Friday against 24 foreign entities, including Russian, Chinese and North Korean firms, for allegedly selling banned weapons to Iran and Syria.

The move drew a sharp protest from Moscow.

Russia's state-run arms exporter Rosoboroneksport was among the highest profile firms hit by the measures, imposed under the 2005 Iran and Syria Nonproliferation Act.

The US had already imposed similar sanctions on Rosoboroneksport and Russian plane maker Sukhoi in August 2006 for providing Iran with material that Washington said could be used to make weapons of mass destruction.

"Ultimately, all these decisions constitute an interior problem for the American authorities," the Russian foreign ministry said on Saturday.

"The American state is forbidding itself and American companies from cooperating with our leading businesses. In business terms, that means wasted opportunities," the ministry said.

Russian businesses had already strongly contested the measures on Friday, saying they were respecting international law.

Russia is one of the world's leading arms exporters. In 2005, it sold weapons to 61 countries for a record total of more than six billion dollars.

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"But the best thing was the way he (Saddam) handled the situation. He fought them with this body language, with his eyes and his talk. He became a hero," he said.

The unofficial film of Saddam's hanging, apparently filmed on a mobile phone, showed Shi'ite officials bullying Sadddam, chanting the name of Shi'ite cleric Moqtada al-Sadr and cursing him just before he was hanged.

Saddam, standing on the scaffold, appeared dignified in the face of jeering and insults, making the execution look like an act of revenge and not justice for crimes against humanity.

The US-allied Iraqi government says it is investigating how footage of the execution managed to reach the media. The grainy clips shown on Arab television resembled infamous beheading videos by Sunni Iraqi insurgent groups like al Qaeda.

Some Saudis have been passing around a flood of pro-Saddam poetry on mobile phone text messages. One Gulf newspaper carried a poem that Saudis suspect was penned by a government official.

One piece of verse threatened revenge for Saddam's death.

"Prepare the gun that will avenge Saddam. The criminal who signed the execution order without valid reason cheated us on our celebration day. How beautiful it will be when the bullet goes through the heart of him who betrayed Arabism," it said.

EID REVENGE

Baghdad put Saddam to death on Eid al-Azha, the Feast of the Sacrifice, which falls within the Hajj pilgrimage to Makkah and is the

Drunk Indian passenger held after hoax bomb threat

AFP, New Delhi

A drunk airline passenger who said he would blow up the plane after being refused alcohol was arrested at New Delhi international airport, a report said yesterday.

The Indian man on board an Austrian Airlines flight from Vienna to New Delhi told the crew he was carrying several bombs with him, the Press Trust of India reported, quoting unnamed security officials.

The incident occurred shortly before the plane was about to land.

The passenger had already consumed a large amount of alcohol and was asking for more, but he was denied another drink as the aircraft was about to land, the report said.

After the threat, bomb disposal squads were dispatched and the plane made an emergency landing in New Delhi.

The man, identified as Mirasi Muslim Bilal, was arrested on charges of criminal intimidation, the news agency said.



PHOTO: STAR

Nagorik Committee stages a demonstration in Chittagong yesterday condemning the execution of former Iraqi president Saddam Hussein while city Mayor ABM Mohiuddin Chowdhury, inset, prays for salvation of the departed soul of Saddam.

Saddam death raises tribal ire in Saudi Arabia

REUTERS, Riyadh

Saddam Hussein's unruly execution on the feast of Eid al-Azha by masked Shi'ite hangmen taunting him on the gallows has revived Sunni Arab fears that the Iraqi government is run by vengeful sectarian Shi'ites backed by Iran.

Feelings run particularly high in Saudi Arabia and Egypt, the two main bastions of Sunni Islam.

For clerics from Saudi Arabia's hardline Wahhabi branch of Islam, the execution proved that Iraqi Shi'ites, in alliance with Iran, are infidels who have declared war on Sunni Islam.

For ordinary Saudis, it was an affront to their sense of Arab tribal honour.

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most important day in the Islamic calendar.

Egypt and Saudi Arabia both criticised Iraq over the timing, which provoked an outpouring of pro-Saddam feeling in Egypt too.

"Everyone inside and outside Iraq understands the poor timing as a message aimed at humiliating every Arab," Makram Mohamed Ahmed said in Egypt's main daily al-Ahram on Wednesday.

Several hundred people gathered at the Egyptian lawyers' syndicate building in Cairo on Wednesday to say prayers for the soul of a man who for three decades ran one of the most brutal dictatorships of modern times.

Saudi clerics, who have stepped up their anti-Shi'ite rhetoric in recent months as sectarian violence takes Iraq to the brink of civil war, were also indignant over the execution, although they had despised Saddam as a heretical secular tyrant.

"The timing shows how much Shi'ites hate Sunnis in Iraq and all the Islamic world," Nasser al-Omar, one of the leading authorities of Wahhabi Islam, said this week on his Web site.

"They want to link Saddam to Sunni Islam, blame Sunnis for his mistakes and show his execution as a victory for Shi'ites."

Saudi Arabia has made clear it wants US forces to remain in Iraq for fear of massacres of Sunnis by Shi'ites.

Al-Omar employed sectarian language used by militant groups such as al Qaeda in Iraq, describing Shi'ites as "Safavids" after a 15th-century dynasty that made Shi'ism the state religion in Iran, and "sons of Ibn Alqami" after a Shi'ite minister who Sunnis say connived to let the Mongols sack Baghdad in 1258.

Saudis are thought to make up a significant proportion of the Arab fighters who joined al Qaeda in Iraq after the 2003 US-led invasion that ended Saddam's rule and brought Shi'ites to power.

Al Qaeda -- which is inspired by Wahhabi ideology and headed by a Saudi, Osama bin Laden -- has used suicide bombings to wreak carnage among Shi'ite civilians in Iraq. Shi'ites say attacks on Sunnis are revenge for the suicide bombs.

Malaysia confident of safe ASEAN summit in Philippines

AFP, Kuala Lumpur

Malaysia said yesterday it was confident a key Southeast Asian summit in the Philippines would be free of terrorist attacks despite warnings from Australia, Britain, Canada and the US, state media said.

Foreign Minister Syed Hamid Albar said Malaysia had assessed the security situation and was confident that Manila had taken steps to ensure safety at the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) summit.

After Malaysia "had done its evaluation, we believe the Philippine government has taken the appropriate measures to ensure the security of the leaders from ASEAN during the summit," he was quoted as saying by the Bernama news agency.

The annual ASEAN summit and meetings with the grouping's East Asian dialogue partners were scheduled for December on the central Philippine island of Cebu, but were postponed after the last minute until January 10 to 15.

The gathering was called off after Philippine President Gloria Arroyo cited worries over an approaching typhoon.

However, Canada, Britain, Australia and the United States issued travel advisories last month warning of a possible terror attack in Cebu, and the warnings were seen by many as the reason for the cancellation.

Embassies for Canada, Britain and Australia in the Philippines were Friday still warning of a possible terrorist threat days before Asian leaders were due to arrive in Cebu.

Syed Hamid said he was hopeful the summit would proceed smoothly despite the warnings, Bernama reported.

The Philippine government has confirmed attendance by all 16 heads of state of ASEAN member countries and their East Asian dialogue partners.