

Iraq threatens to review ties with Saddam execution critics

AFP, Baghdad

Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki yesterday threatened to "review" relations with countries which have criticised the bungled execution of Saddam Hussein, saying the hanging was an internal matter.

As Maliki lashed out at critics of his government, 27 bodies of people killed execution-style in central Baghdad were found, providing more grisly evidence of Iraq's raging sectarian conflict.

"The Iraqi government could be obliged to review its relations with any state that fails to respect the wish of the Iraqi people," said Maliki in his first reaction to the ousted president's hanging in Baghdad on December 30.

"We consider the execution of

the dictator an internal affair that concerns only the Iraqi people," said Maliki, speaking at a ceremony on the 86th anniversary of the Iraqi army.

Maliki also lashed out at those who criticised the execution.

"We find that this conduct is inciting sedition and flagrant interference in the internal affairs of Iraq and abuses feelings of the families of the victims."

A number of international leaders have criticised Saddam's hanging saying it appeared as a sectarian lynching rather than a court-directed punishment after a guard, believed to be a Shia, taunted the Sunni former president in his final moments.

The strongest criticism came from Egyptian President Hosni

Mubarak who even said that the execution had turned Saddam into a "martyr."

Echoing Mubarak's view was German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier who warned in an interview to be published Sunday that Saddam could gain an iconic status following the execution.

"There is surely a risk that this execution, carried out on a Muslim holiday and hyped up by the media, is creating the conditions to make Saddam a martyr to his countrymen," he told the German weekly *Bild am Sonntag*.

"The first signs of this are the numerous visits to his tomb," he noted, adding "it is still not clear if (the hanging) could lead to a new escalation of the violence in Iraq."



PHOTO: AFP
Some 400 Moroccans demonstrate in front of the US embassy in Rabat Friday over the hanging of former Iraqi president Saddam Hussein and call for the non-execution of former intelligence chief Barzan al-Tikriti and revolutionary court judge Awad al-Bandar. Posters read "Boycott the US embassy activities in Morocco", "No to the execution of Saddam's companions Barazan and Bandar."



PHOTO: AFP
Sri Lankan onlookers gather at the site of a blast triggered by a powerful bomb inside a crowded bus, at Godegama in the outskirts of Hikkaduwa, southern Sri Lanka yesterday. At least 15 people were killed and more than 32 wounded in southern Sri Lanka when a powerful bomb went off inside a crowded bus, the second such attack in two days, police said.

Commander among 18 Taliban killed

AFP, Kandahar

Afghan forces backed by Nato-led troops fought Taliban insurgents in southern Afghanistan killing 15, including a regional commander, while three more died planting a bomb, police said.

Fighting erupted in Kajaki district of southern Helmand province late Thursday when militants armed with machine guns and rockets attacked patrolling troops, regional police commander Nabi Jan Mullah Khail said on Friday.

"Our troops were on a routine patrol when they came under attack from the enemy. We killed 15 Taliban in the gunfight," he said, adding that a Taliban commander named Mullah Azizullah was among the dead.

The district was the scene of intense fighting earlier in the week, with police saying Wednesday that 17 rebels were killed in a three-day operation there also involving International Security Assistance Force (Isaf) troops.

Isaf is represented in Helmand - which produces most of Afghanistan's opium crop - by about 4,500 British troops.

HADITHA KILLING US marines killed Iraqis one by one

AFP, Washington

An investigative report compiled by the US military indicates that US marines gunned down five unarmed Iraqis who stumbled onto the scene of a 2005 roadside bombing in Haditha, Iraq, The Washington Post reported Saturday.

Citing the document obtained by the newspaper, the account said that Staff Sergeant Frank Wuterich, the squad's leader, shot the men one by one after marines ordered them out of a white taxi in the moments following the explosion, which killed one marine and injured two others.

Another marine fired rounds into their bodies as they lay on the ground, the paper said, citing the military report.

"The taxi's five occupants exited the vehicle and according to US and Iraqi witnesses, were shot by Wuterich as they stood, unarmed, next to the vehicle approximately ten feet in front of him," The Post quotes the report by the Naval Criminal Investigative Service as saying.

One of the witnesses, Sergeant

US marines killed Iraqis one by one

AP, United Nations

Asad Amer Mashoot, a 26-year-old Iraqi soldier who was in the marine convoy, told investigators he watched in horror as the four soldiers and the taxi driver fell.

"They didn't even try to run away," the report quotes him as saying. "We were afraid from marines and we saw them behaving like crazy. They were yelling and screaming."

The shootings were the first in a series of violent reactions by marines on November 19, 2005 that left 24 Iraqi civilians dead, the paper said.

The report, which relied on hundreds of interviews with marines, Iraqi soldiers and civilian survivors conducted months after the incident, provides evidence that the marines responded to the roadside bombing in ways that are difficult to reconcile with their rules of engagement.

Four marines were charged with murder last month in connection with the civilian deaths in Haditha: Wuterich, Sergeant Sanick Dela Cruz, Lance Corporal Justin Sharratt and Lance Corporal Stephen Tatum.

UN investigated over 300 for sex abuse

AP, United Nations

The United Nations has investigated more than 300 members of UN peacekeeping missions for alleged sexual exploitation and abuse during the past three years and more than half were fired or sent home, according to a senior UN official.

The announcement came as the United Nations was trying to determine whether a report in a British newspaper involved new allegations or ones the UN had investigated or was investigating.

"The United Nations has done more in the last two years than ever before to try to combat sex abuse in its 16 peacekeeping missions," said a UN spokesman. "But we're not satisfied with where we are."

With nearly 200,000 people from more than 100 countries rotating through the peacekeeping missions every year, some people "are going to behave badly," she told a news conference. "What's different now is ... our determination to stay with this problem ... and constantly improve our ability to deal with it."

Nepali Maoists set 8-day deadline for interim constitution

REUTERS, AFP, Kathmandu

Nepal's Maoists will organise street protests if the government fails to issue a provisional constitution in the next eight days to pave the way for the rebels to join an interim cabinet, their chief Prachanda said.

But the rebels will not desert the peace process nor break the ceasefire even if the deadline is not met, the 52-year-old guerrilla chief said late on Friday at Dolakha, 100 km northeast of Kathmandu.

"There will be peaceful protests and the civil society will join them," Prachanda said in Nepali on the independent Kantipur television.

The Maoists signed a landmark peace deal in November declaring an end to the decade-old conflict in which more than 13,000 people have died.

As part of the deal they agreed to have a temporary constitution

that envisages an interim parliament and a government, which includes the rebels.

But the government says the interim constitution will become effective only after Maoist arms are locked in stores under UN supervision as part of the peace deal.

The UN has said some of its officials would be able to start monitoring the arms on Jan. 15, but a full monitoring mission will not be in place for some more time. It has not given any timeframe for this.

Maoists say the delay in issuing the interim statute would push back elections set for mid-June for an assembly tasked with preparing a permanent constitution and deciding the future of the monarchy the rebels want abolished.

Senior political leaders and the Maoists in December 2006 finalised an interim constitution that opened doors for the former rebels to join the government.

European rights panel urges end to all executions in Iraq

AFP, Strasbourg

The Council of Europe, a pan-European human rights watchdog body, appealed Friday to Iraq to immediately stop all executions, amid international criticism of the handling of Saddam's hanging last Saturday.

The call came ahead of the postponed hanging of two Saddam aides sentenced with him for the murder of 147 Shia villagers.

"We express our solidarity with the Iraqi people and reiterate our unequivocal condemnation of the crimes committed by the regime of Saddam Hussein," said a statement by the 46-member Strasbourg-based forum linking nations in east and west Europe.

"But we also call for an immediate end of executions and the abolition of the death penalty in Iraq," it urged.

"The message to our friends in Iraq is based on our own experience in Europe; namely that the death penalty violates human rights, and that without human rights there can be no justice, peace and reconciliation."

The Iraqi government Thursday

postponed the execution of Barzan al-Tikriti, Saddam's half brother and former intelligence chief, and Awad al-Bandar, the head of a revolutionary court, amid international criticism of the handling of Saddam's hanging last Saturday.

It did not set a precise date but the hangings are now expected shortly after the end of state holidays for the Eid al-Adha festival on Saturday.

The text of the Council of Europe appeal was co-signed by Rene van der Linden, chairman of the Council of Europe's parliamentary assembly, and Fiorenzo Stolfi, foreign minister of San Marino and currently chair of the Council's Committee of Ministers.

Reacting immediately after the execution last Saturday, the Council of Europe's Secretary General Terry Davis described the Saddam trial as a "missed opportunity" for Iraq to join the civilized world.

What Iraqis needed was "justice, reconciliation and peace, not hangings and revenge," Davis said.

Noida child killer suspects undergo 'truth' tests

REUTERS, Gandhinagar

The police on Friday began administering a cocktail of drugs and chemicals to act as a sort of truth serum on two men suspected in the rape and killing of at least 17 people, mostly children, in Noida.

The gruesome killings came to light last week after police dug up skulls and bones in the backyard of a house in Noida, an industrial town on the outskirts of New Delhi.

The businessman who owns the house and his servant were arrested after the macabre discovery that had grieving parents spilling into the streets to protest the delay in investigating reports of missing children over the last two years.

On Friday, the two suspects were put through a series of narco-analysis, brain mapping and polygraph, lie detector, tests at a forensic laboratory in Gujarat.

The tests are not admissible as evidence in court, but police say help them better understand a suspect.

"We will also examine their behaviour and response to several questions put before them," said J. Vyas, director of the state-run Directorate of Forensic Sciences.

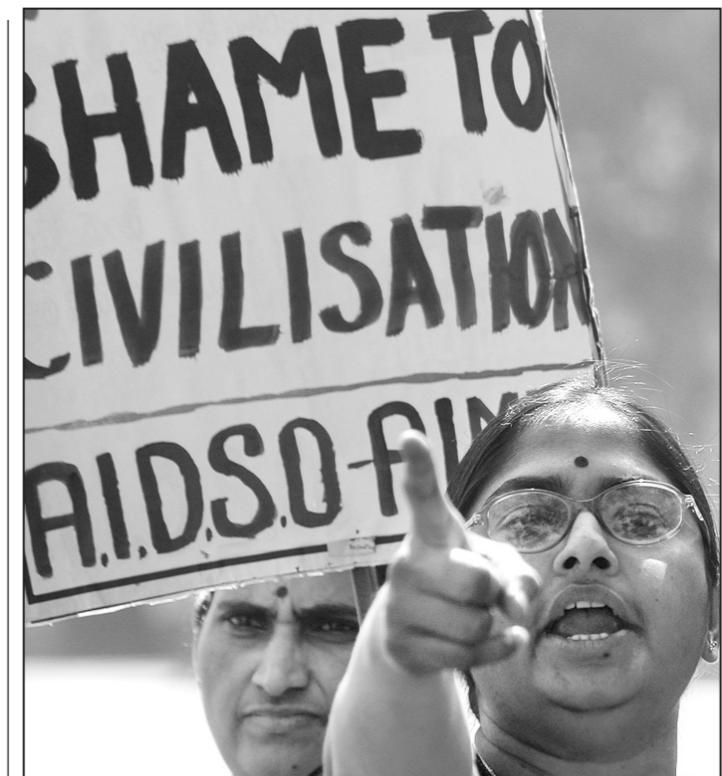


PHOTO: AFP
Members of the All India Democratic Students Organisation (AIDS) stage a protest against the Noida case of mass murder of children in Hyderabad, southern India yesterday.

Abbas for integrating Hamas men in security forces

Israel army stages brief Gaza incursion

AFP, Ramallah/ Gaza City

Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas yesterday demanded that a force led by the ruling Hamas movement be integrated into existing security structures and reshuffle the leadership of Palestinian security services.

"The executive force (controlled by Hamas) is illegal... and will be treated as such if it is not immediately integrated... into legal security services as stipulated by basic law," said statement from the presidency.

Abbas also "decided to reshuffle and make new appointments in the security services and their leadership," it said.

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