

## Four US soldiers killed in Iraq

US airstrike kills six

AFP, Baghdad/Samarra

The US military announced yesterday the deaths of four soldiers, including three who were killed in a roadside bombing in Baghdad that also left two Iraqis dead while six Iraqis were killed in US airstrike.

Two soldiers were killed when their vehicle was struck while on patrol in Baghdad while a third injured in the attack died later of his wounds, the military said in a series of statements.

It gave no further details of the incident.

Meanwhile, an airstrike by a US Apache helicopter near the central Iraq city of Samarra on Saturday killed six Iraqis and wounded two, an anti-Qaeda leader and the American military said.

Abu Faruq, leader of an anti-Qaeda "Awakening" front in Samarra, said those killed were members of his group who had been manning a checkpoint when they came under attack.

The US military, however, said the assault had been launched after five people "were spotted conducting suspicious terrorist activity" in an area known for roadside bomb attacks near Samarra, 125 kilometres (80 miles) north of Baghdad.

## Tigers strike back sinking Lankan navy craft

10 sailors go missing, heavy land battles erupt

AFP, Colombo

Tamil Tiger rebels struck back against a mounting Sri Lankan military offensive yesterday by sinking a naval fast attack craft, leaving 10 sailors missing, officials said.

A navy craft was destroyed in a "mystery blast" caused by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), the defence ministry said, adding that the guerrillas appeared to have developed new underwater capabilities.

"The navy suspects the blast was caused by a possible sea mine or due to some underwater weapon" developed by the rebels, the ministry said, adding that there was no sea battle or any guerrilla craft in sight during the sinking.

The military retaliated with combined land-air attacks against suspected Tiger positions, capturing some land in Mannar district, while ground troops killed 15 rebels, the defence ministry said, adding that two soldiers also died.

There was no immediate word from the rebels about the land offensive.

But the LTTE said they sank the navy craft by using three suicide bombers in the pre-dawn attack in high seas off rebel-held Mullaitivu district.

Six sailors from the locally made Dvora-class fast attack craft were rescued by another boat patrolling off Mullaitivu where the Tigers have their main military bases, navy spokesman D K P Dassanayake said.

Ten more were missing after the blast.

"The officer in charge and five others from the FAC (fast attack craft) were rescued," Dassanayake said. "One of them said the craft started taking on water after a huge explosion. They got into a lifeboat."

The pro-rebel Tamilnet.com website reported the navy craft was sunk in a suicide attack launched by three "Black Sea Tigers," or suicide bombers.

The Tamil Tigers are known for their trademark suicide bombings and have been outlawed as a "terrorist" outfit by the United States since October 1997.

The sinking of the navy boat came hours after a military bus was hit by a landmine in the district of Mannar on Friday night, leaving at least two soldiers dead and six wounded, the military said.

The government claims it has killed 2,257 rebels since January against the loss of 133 of its own troops. The government allows no journalists or rights groups into the embattled regions, making it impossible to verify the figures.

However, troops have made little progress in taking rebel territory in the island's north, military sources said.

Thousands of people have been killed in a new wave of fighting since December 2005, when a Norwegian-brokered truce began to unravel. The truce was formally ended by the government in January.

## Workers punished for US passport breach

AP, Washington

Two companies that provide workers for the State Department say they fired or otherwise punished those who improperly accessed the passport records of the three major presidential candidates. The security breaches touched off demands for a congressional investigation.

"None of us wants to have a circumstance in which any American's passport file is looked at in an unauthorized way," said Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice as she offered apologies to the candidates.

Stanley Inc., based in Arlington, Va., and The Analysis Corp., or TAC, of McLean, Virginia, said Friday that their employees' actions were unauthorized and not consistent with company policies.

Stanley said it fired two subcontractors involved in accessing the files of Sen. Barack Obama when their actions were discovered. A separate search showed that workers also had snooped on Sens. John McCain and Hillary Rodham Clinton, State Department spokesman Sean McCormack said.



Photo obtained yesterday shows Tibetan girls standing on a sidewalk by burning equipment removed from nearby shops amid clashes on March 14 in Lhasa as the Tibetan capital erupted in deadly violence with security forces using gunfire to quell the biggest protests against Chinese rule in two decades.

## China rejects dialogue, vows to smash Tibetan protests

AFP, Beijing

China turned its back Saturday on appeals for dialogue with the Dalai Lama, vowing to smash anti-China forces in Tibet, where it said the death toll from recent unrest had risen to 19.

A day after Beijing launched a manhunt for monks and others it blamed for violence in Tibet, an editorial in the People's Daily, mouthpiece of the Chinese Communist party, said opposition to Chinese rule in the Himalayan region must be wiped out.

"China must resolutely crush the conspiracy of sabotage and smash 'Tibet independence forces'," the newspaper said in the editorial, rejecting calls from US, European and Asian leaders for talks.

The commentary accused the Dalai Lama of masterminding protests in Tibet in the hope of undermining the August 8-24 Beijing Olympics and gaining Tibet independence from Beijing.

It said that "1.3 billion Chinese people, including the Tibetan people, would allow no person or force to undermine the stability of the region."

The commentary effectively

rebuffed growing international calls for dialogue to end the crackdown on protests that began last week to mark the anniversary of a 1959 uprising against Beijing's rule.

Earlier Saturday, China said 18 "innocent" civilians and one police officer were killed in rioting in the Tibetan capital, Lhasa, raising its official death toll from 13.

Tibet's government-in-exile in the Indian hill town of Dharamshala has put the toll from a week of unrest across the Himalayan region and neighbouring provinces at 99.

The government-in-exile also said talks with its spiritual leader the Dalai Lama were more crucial "than ever before" as Beijing vowed to crush anti-China forces in Tibet.

The comments came after the People's Daily, mouthpiece of China's Communist party, said earlier in the day that opposition to Chinese rule in Tibet must be smashed and turned its back on world calls for talks with the Buddhist leader.

Talks are more necessary than ever before, Thubten Samphel, spokesman for the exiled administration, which has its headquarters in northern India, told AFP.

On Friday, leaders in Japan and Poland joined the United States and other countries in an international appeal for restraint and dialogue.

They were joined on Saturday by 30 prominent Chinese writers and intellectuals who signed a letter to their government urging talks with the Tibetan spiritual leader.

They also called on China to open Tibet up to foreign media and to allow a team of independent UN investigators to carry out a full investigation of "the evidence, the course of the incident, the number of casualties, etc."

The signatories, who included Liu Xiaobo, Teng Biao, Wang Qisheng and other noted rights activists, also said China should show evidence it says it possesses that proves the Dalai Lama was behind the uprising.

US House of Representatives speaker Nancy Pelosi has also demanded that China come clean on repression in Tibet.

"The situation in Tibet is a challenge to the conscience of the world," said Pelosi, who was greeted in Dharamshala by thousands of flag-waving Tibetan exiles as she arrived for talks Friday with Tibet's exiled spiritual leader.



Chaudhry Shujat Hussain (C) head of Pakistan Muslim League-Q (PML-Q), which backs President Pervez Musharraf, speaks in a media briefing as Farooq Sattar (L) the candidate of the Karachi-based Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM) listens after quitting the race for prime minister in Islamabad yesterday.

## Pak leaders plan talks with militants

AFP, Washington

The leaders of the newly-formed coalition government in Pakistan intend to start negotiations with Islamic militants in the hope of ending a spate of bombings that has shaken the country, The New York Times reported on its website late Friday.

The newspaper said the leaders of the ruling coalition -- Asif Ali Zardari of the Pakistan People's Party and Nawaz Sharif, head of the Pakistan Muslim League-N -- said in interviews that they will use military force only as a last resort.

President Pervez Musharraf has summoned the new parliament on Monday to elect a prime minister, which will clear the way for a coalition government hostile to him to start business.

The allies of Musharraf, who seized power in a military coup in 1999, lost heavily in the February elections.

Benazir Bhutto's widow and co-chairman of the party, Zardari, has held a series of meetings with legislators and coalition partners on the choice of prime minister, but no clear front runner has emerged.

The talk of a softer approach to militants has alarmed US officials, who fear it could create problems for the US-led war on terror just as President Musharraf has given the administration of President George W. Bush a freer hand to strike at militants using pilotless Predator drones, the report said.

Many Pakistanis, however, are convinced that the surge in suicide bombings -- 17 in the first 10 weeks of 2008 -- is retaliation for three Predator strikes since the beginning of the year, The Times said.

Speaking in separate interviews, Zardari and Sharif tried to strike a more independent stance, from Washington, the paper noted.

## Nepal govt invites armed ethnic groups for talks

All parties must stop violence for polls: UN

AFP, Kathmandu

Nepal's caretaker government has invited armed ethnic groups from the tense south of the country for talks ahead of crucial polls next month, the country's peace minister said yesterday.

"We have sent letters to four armed group outfits of Terai inviting them to dialogue with the government. We are waiting for their response," Ram Chandra Poudel told AFP.

Since a 2006 peace deal between former rebel Maoists and mainstream parties in Kathmandu ended a decade-long civil war, Nepal's southern plains region has seen sporadic violent unrest that has left at least 200 people dead.

In February the country was brought to a standstill when groups representing the residents of the Terai, known as Mahadhesis, called a crippling two-week general strike.

Tensions have remained in the run-up to national elections on

April 10, which will appoint a body to rewrite Nepal's constitution -- the culmination of the nation's peace process.

The United Nations and the European Union have warned that the southern unrest could scupper the polls.

All political groups in Nepal, including the country's ex-rebel Maoists, must stop using violence and intimidation in the run up to crucial polls planned for April, the United Nations said yesterday.

## Polls create rifts in Bhutan as king's absolute rule ends

AFP, Thimphu

Bhutan's shift from absolute monarchy to the world's newest democracy is creating unprecedented rifts as people row over which party to vote for in next week's elections, observers say.

The isolated Buddhist kingdom, perched in the Himalayas between India and China, has long stressed community bonding, but divisions ahead of the elections are creating serious problems, they say.

Political tempers are running so high "people aren't talking to each other" even though there are no major ideological differences between the two major parties competing for power, said Tashi

Dorji, editor of Bhutan Observer. "It's happening throughout the country," Dorji said in an interview in the capital Thimphu.

Nearly 70 percent of the population of under 700,000 live in remote mountain villages and the two main parties competing to form Bhutan's first elected government are in a tight race.

A family of six fled their house after one son threatened to burn down the house in a drunken rage if they did not support the party of his choice, the weekly Bhutan Observer reported.

In another sign of disharmony, a nephew and an uncle are pitted against each other, dividing the village where they live into two camps.

## Congress, NCP in straight fight for Meghalaya Rajya Sabha seat

PTI, Shillong

The lone Rajya Sabha seat in Meghalaya will see a fight between Congress and NCP-led ruling Meghalaya Progressive Alliance.

Political observers in the state feel that the MPA's candidate backed by its partners of regional parties and independents has a better chance of winning than the Congress nominee.

The election to the RS seat will be held on March 26.

Congress has fielded former chief minister S C Marak, while NCP's Thomas A Sangma is the MPA candidate.

Going by numbers, Sangma has the edge as MPA has 31 legislators in 60-member Meghalaya House. Opposition comprises Congress's 25 MLAs and three independents.

Even if Congress wins in Baghmara seat, where counting of votes is slated for March 25, Opposition strength will be 29 in the House.

## Indefinite curfew imposed in Pak town after sectarian clashes

PTI, Islamabad

Indefinite curfew has been clamped on the northwestern Pakistani town of Hangu after sectarian clashes left at least four persons including a policeman dead and 25 others injured.

Rival Sunni and Shia groups exchanged fire during the clashes yesterday which coincided with the celebrations to mark the Persian New Year 'Navroz' and the birth anniversary of Prophet Mohammed.

The two groups clashed with heavy weapons, including mortars and rockets.

The administration imposed indefinite curfew in the town and held a series of jurgas to restore peace and harmony in the area, officials said.

One police official was among the persons killed while two policemen were among the 25 people injured, they said.



Supporters of opposition Kuomintang (KMT) party presidential candidate Ma Ying-jeou celebrate outside the KMT headquarters in Taipei yesterday as election results show Ma won the race for president.

## Palestinians extend reconciliation talks

AP, Ramallah

Reconciliation talks between rival Palestinian factions Hamas and Fatah have been extended through Saturday, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas said.

On Thursday, Abbas' Fatah party and the Islamic Hamas movement that rules Gaza accused each other of sabotaging the talks. But Abbas told a news conference on Friday that the two sides have agreed to keep the talks in the Yemeni capital Sana'a going at the request of Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh.

"We don't want to say the talks have failed," Abbas said. "We hope for a positive outcome."

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## Tender Notice for supplying integrated Antivirus Software Package

Sealed quotations are invited from bonafide Manufacturer / Local Agent / Dealer / Distributor / Supplier of integrated Antivirus Software package. Detailed particulars and specifications of the work are available in the Tender Schedule which can be obtained from the office of the undersigned during the office hours from 25 March 2008 to 02 April 2008 up to 3:00 pm at a cost of Tk. 500/- (non-refundable) through Pay Order in favor of Islami Bank Bangladesh Limited. The quotations will be dropped at the tender Box at the above tender address from 25 March 2008 to 02 April 2008 up to 3:00 pm. which will be opened on 03 April 2008 at 03:15 pm in presence of the tenderers or their representatives, if any.

Islami Bank Bangladesh Limited reserves the right to accept or reject any tender, proposal, partially or wholly without assigning any reason whatsoever.

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## TENDER NOTICE

Sealed Tenders are hereby invited by Hotels International Limited (HIL) for the under mentioned work/job of the Pan Pacific Sonargaon Hotel, 107 Kazi Nazrul Islam Avenue, Dhaka-1215, Bangladesh from eligible contractors.

- Name of Works:**
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- Time allowed for the work in serial (a) and (b) are 120 (one hundred twenty) and 30 (thirty) days respectively inclusive of weekly and public holidays, from the day of issuance of the Work Order.
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- Project Engineer.