

US aid ships to leave Myanmar

AP, Yangon
The U.S. military ordered navy ships loaded with relief aid off Myanmar's coast to leave the area today after the ruling junta refused to give them permission to help survivors of last month's devastating cyclone.

Adm. Timothy Keating, the top commander in the Pacific, ordered the USS Essex and accompanying vessels to depart the Myanmar area after what he said were 15 separate attempts in recent weeks to get the junta's authorisation to help with relief efforts.

Myanmar's state media has said it feared a US invasion aimed at seizing the country's oil deposits.

The ruling generals also have forbidden the use of military helicopters from friendly neighboring nations, which are vital in rushing supplies to isolated survivors in the Irrawaddy delta. This has forced aid agencies to scour for civilian aircraft around the world and bring them in at dramatically increasing costs.

Bomb blast kills 3 in Peshawar

AP, Peshawar
A bomb explosion ripped through a video shop in a business center of northwest Pakistan on yesterday, killing three people and wounding three, police said.

The blast came as investigators probed who was behind a car bomb that exploded just outside the Danish embassy earlier this week. It could add to concern that Pakistan's efforts to strike peace deals with militants are failing to end violence.

Local police chief Abdul Rauf said the latest attack happened in the town of Kohat, about 45 miles south of Peshawar, the capital of North West Frontier Province bordering Afghanistan. He said the dead and injured were taken to a hospital.

The blast also damaged other video and CD stores nearby.

There was no immediate claim of responsibility, but previous bombings in this volatile region have been blamed on pro-Taliban militants who consider music and movies un-Islamic. Just weeks ago, suspected militants sent letters to shop owners in Kohat and elsewhere in the region, warning them to close their businesses.

US, Pakistan military chiefs hold talks

AFP, Islamabad
US military chief Admiral Mike Mullen held a second day of counter-terrorism talks with Pakistani army top brass yesterday, two days after a suicide bomb killed six people in the capital, officials said.

Mullen held a second meeting with Pakistan army chief General Ashfaq Kayani following his arrival Tuesday on a two-day visit, his third trip to the nuclear-armed nation since parliamentary polls in February.

The elections saw allies of President Pervez Musharraf, a key US ally on Washington's "war on terror", routed, and Washington has expressed concerns over the new government's peace talks with Taliban militants.

Mullen is not scheduled to meet Musharraf or the new political leadership, said US embassy spokeswoman Elizabeth Colton.

"There is no plan for that. The emphasis of the visit is military-to-military cooperation," Colton told AFP.

S Korea offers food aid to hungry North

AFP, Seoul
South Korea yesterday offered to provide 50,000 tonnes of corn in humanitarian aid to famine-hit North Korea despite strained relations with the communist state.

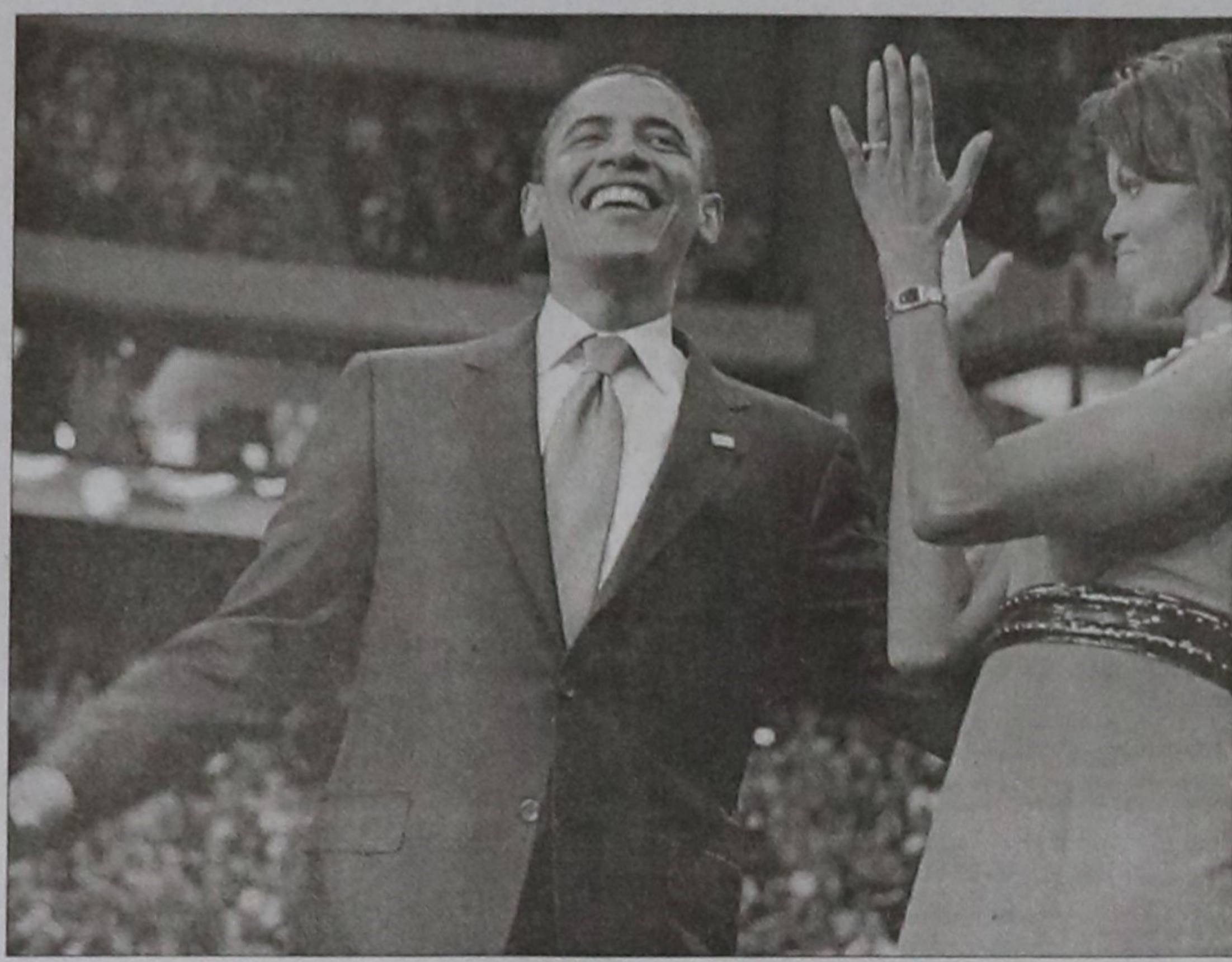
Unification Minister Kim Ha-joong said he had proposed that the food aid three weeks ago, but Pyongyang has yet to respond.

"The government makes it clear that it has a willingness to discuss and provide the aid," Minister Kim told a briefing.

"I hope North Korea will respond positively to this."

Kim's proposal was the first humanitarian aid offer to North Korea by the conservative government of President Lee Myung-Bak, who took office in February.

North Korea has cut ties with Lee's administration in protest at its former line of linking aid to progress on nuclear disarmament, after 10 years of relatively amicable relations with previous liberal governments in Seoul.



Democratic presidential hopeful Sen. Barack Obama (L) and his wife Michelle Obama wave to supporters during a rally at the Xcel Energy Center on Tuesday night in St. Paul, Minnesota. Obama clinched the Democratic presidential nomination following Tuesday's primaries in South Dakota and Montana.

Asia mulls over possible Obama presidency

AP, Jakarta

Indonesians celebrated the news yesterday that a man who spent his childhood in their nation has locked up the U.S. Democratic nomination, while others across Asia considered how a Barack Obama presidency could improve long-strained foreign relations.

"I never imagined he would become a great man," said Widianto Hendro Cahyono, 48, who sat next to Obama at SDN Menteng elementary school in Jakarta, the Indonesian capital.

Japan was hoping for a moderate shift in Washington following years of militarism, scholars said, and China was eager to see "a new face after the disputed Bush administration."

In beating out Hillary Rodham Clinton, the 46-year-old Illinois senator entered a five-month campaign against Republican Sen. John McCain of Arizona, the 71-

year-old Vietnam prisoner of war and staunch supporter of the U.S.-led campaign in Iraq.

Obama opposed the invasion and has called for an early troop withdrawal. He also has shown willingness to engage in dialogue with Iran, North Korea, Cuba, nations long isolated by the policies of President Bush.

Indonesians were rooting for the man they consider to be a hometown hero. Obama lived in the predominantly Muslim nation from age 6 to 10 with his mother and Indonesian stepfather. Former teachers and classmates fondly remember him.

"He was an average student, but very active," said Cahyono, who was in the same 3rd grade class with Obama in Jakarta.

The school's principal, Kuwadiyanto, was equally proud, saying he hoped one day Obama would come back to visit, while Indonesian Foreign Relations Committee member Djoko Susilo, said

Obama could boost bilateral relations.

A Chinese scholar said that while he did not expect major changes in U.S. foreign policy, he thought the overall tone could shift if Obama were in the White House.

"He will bring new energy into America's domestic politics and foreign policies," said Zhu Feng, deputy director for the Center of International and Strategic Studies at Peking University in Beijing. "It's a good choice for the Democrats."

As for the possibility that Obama could become America's first black president, Zhu said Obama's ethnic background meant little to the Chinese.

"He's displayed compassion, inspiration, wisdom, and intelligence," Zhu said. "He's a fantastic speaker."

Obama has made himself unpopular in Pakistan by saying the US should act alone on information about terrorist targets within its national borders, leading some to believe he will not be any

different from President Bush.

"Obama has threatened attacks against us even before becoming the president, and he will be more dangerous compared to Bush," said 34-year-old Ibrar Ahmad, a lecturer at the Government College in Multan.

In Vietnam, where the Clintons are praised for restoring ties after the war, real-estate salesman Ngo Van Hung, 33, said he switched allegiance to Obama after watching his campaign.

"At first, I supported Hillary Clinton, but the more I read about him, the more I liked Obama," he said. "He would have a better understanding of how to treat people of different nationalities."

Although Obama has not spoken about Washington's relationship with the new Asian economic power India, analyst C. Uday Bhaskar at the New Delhi-based Institute for Defense Studies said his half-Muslim heritage has won him support.

Afghan war could last for another decade

AFP, Sydney

The war in Afghanistan is likely to last at least another decade and 10,000 more foreign troops are needed there now, Australian military and political leaders said yesterday.

"I would say it's an endeavour that will last at least 10 years," the head of the defence force, Air Chief Marshal Angus Houston told a parliamentary committee.

Taliban rebels still control large parts of the southern Uruzgan province where most of Australia's 1,000 troops are deployed, Houston said, despite some successes by Special Forces units.

Defence Minister Joel Fitzgibbon, meanwhile, said at least 10,000 more troops were needed to fight the rebellion but they were unlikely to be provided by European nations.

About 70,000 troops provided by the United States and NATO countries are helping Afghan forces

against the Taliban, who were ousted in a US-led invasion in 2001.

"I am of the view that we need at the very least an additional 10,000 troops in Afghanistan and to be frank I don't see any Europeans who look likely to put up substantial numbers any time soon," Fitzgibbon told the national AAP news agency in an interview.

"I fear it will fall to the US to do a lot on the military front and I sense a willingness on their part to do so. But, of course, they have enormous concurrency issues. They are over-stretched."

Fitzgibbon ruled out Australia committing more troops to Afghanistan.

"We are the largest non-NATO contributor. We are the 10th largest contributor overall and we are just not prepared to do more while ever we are of the view that there are others that could be doing more," he said.

"Just as importantly, we simply don't have the capacity."

UN fears more food shortages in Myanmar

AFP, Bangkok

Cyclone Nargis has prevented many farmers in Myanmar's rice-growing region from planting their new crop, raising fears of food shortages this year, UN agriculture officials said yesterday.

Rice stocks and paddies were pummeled when the deadly storm hit, and the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) has stressed that the new planting season must begin in early June to stave off further tragedy.

But early June has crept around, and still farmers are languishing without aid supplies more than one month after the cyclone hit and left more than 133,000 people dead or missing.

"Many areas are still empty and farmers haven't yet come back because of the lack of shelter and lack of food," the FAO's deputy regional representative Hiroyuki

Konuma told reporters in Bangkok.

"We have to complete sowing by the end of July latest otherwise it will create tremendous damage to productivity and affect income and eventually will affect national security of Myanmar itself."

The FAO estimates that 16 percent of the 1.3 million hectares (3.2 million acres) of agricultural land in the Irrawaddy Delta region have been seriously damaged after the cyclone caused flooding, while sea water has poisoned the soil.

Much of the rice seed which would have been used for the monsoon harvest -- which accounts for 80 percent of Myanmar's annual rice yield -- was lost or damaged by the cyclone, UN officials say.

"It's likely that the harvest will not be able to take place for another year," said Paul Risley of the UN's World Food Programme.



A Palestinian boy waits for his travel permit to be released while Palestinian Fulbright scholars Hadeel Abu Kawik (C), Doa Abu Amsha (L) and Nadel Telbani (R) sit at the Hamsa-Hamsa station on the Palestinian side of the Erez terminal yesterday, while leaving the Gaza Strip to deposit visa applications for the United States in Jerusalem. The scholars, who have received US-funded Fulbright grants, may be allowed to leave the besieged Gaza Strip, officials said on Tuesday, but hundreds of other students remain stranded.

Poor people's income dips 36pc

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The paper said the budget for the current fiscal year kept around Tk 6,000 crore as subsidies but it may go over Tk 16,000 crore due to fuel, food and fertiliser price hike.

As the prices of fuels have increased significantly in the global market, it suggested that the government re-fixes fuel prices to keep a balance in revenue expenditure.

"The prices of fuels were last re-fixed in April 2007 considering the market situation of that particular time. After that global fuel prices have increased a lot and so the government has to re-fix the prices soon to cope with the situation," the CPD executive director said.

The import prices of crude petroleum and diesel have gone up to \$130 and \$169 per barrel. However, these were \$67 and \$85 per barrel when the current budget was prepared, the paper mentioned.

"The government may have to increase fuel prices soon, but while doing so, it will have to consider the purchasing capability of the general public as poor people use kerosene and the farmers use diesel for irrigation...The government should keep in mind," Mustafizur Rahman said.

The common people all on a sudden.

He also cautioned the government of high deficit of the budget of fiscal year 2008. He said high deficit sustained for a long period of time may create a vicious circle of borrowing and higher revenue expenditure through debt servicing liabilities.

Citing example of India, he said the neighbouring country continues a deficit of over six percent of GDP through the 1990s and the early years of this decade resulting in an expenditure of over 25 percent of the total budget for interest payment.

Bangladesh now spends around 13 percent of its expenditure budget on interest payment.

Mustafizur Rahman said the country's industrial sector is not performing up to its potential due to the volatile situation in the power sector and foreign investors are also uninterested in coming here due to this problem.

"If we select two most prioritised sectors, these are food and power," he added.

About power, he further told the conference that a total of 12 power plants were planned to be set up in the country during 2008 with a production capacity of 694 megawatts. However, only one plant has been put into service so far.

Turkish court set to rule on headscarf law

AFP, Ankara

Turkey's top court will consider Thursday cancelling a law allowing women to wear Islamic headscarves in universities, in a case with possible repercussions for the survival of the country's ruling party.

The main opposition party has asked the Constitutional Court to abolish the law, which was pushed through parliament in February by the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) which has its roots in a banned Islamist movement.

Opponents say the constitutional amendment allowing the headscarves poses a threat to Muslim Turkey's secular principles.

The case has taken on an added dimension amid ongoing legal efforts, also before the Constitutional Court, to have the AKP outlawed on charges that it is covertly seeking to install an Islamist regime.

Turkey's chief prosecutor has cited the headscarf amendment as evidence of the AKP's anti-secular leanings.

UN urged to get Sudan to surrender Darfur suspects

AFP, Khartoum

Human rights watchdogs urged the UN Security Council, whose members were holding talks in Khartoum yesterday, to press Sudan to surrender Darfur war crimes suspects to the world court.

For more than a year, Sudan has ignored arrest warrants from the International Criminal Court (ICC) for Sudan's secretary of state for humanitarian affairs Ahmed Haroun and Janjaweed militia leader Ali Koshelb.

After its talks in Khartoum, the UN Security Council mission is due to visit Darfur on Thursday, the same day the ICC chief prosecutor is to unveil details of a new case against senior figures in the war-torn western region.

"The United Nations Security Council should press Sudan to surrender war crimes suspects Ahmed Haroun and Ali Koshelb to the ICC in The Hague," said Justice for Darfur -- an international coalition of around 30 rights groups.



Sri Lankan policemen walk past a stationery train on the outskirts of Colombo yesterday after a bomb blast. At least 18 people were wounded in the rush-hour blast on a packed train just outside Sri Lanka's capital after a bomb, which had been laid on a stretch of track parallel to where the train was passing, exploded between Colombo's Wellawatte and Dehiwela areas.

Car bomb kills 13 in Baghdad

AP, Baghdad

A car bomb in northeast Baghdad killed at least 13 people yesterday, Iraqi police and hospital officials said, while three U.S. soldiers were shot dead in northern Iraq.

The car bomb went off around 2:30 p.m. near the house of an Iraqi police general. The general was not hurt, but more than 50 people were wounded, officials said. It was the largest death toll from a car bomb in Baghdad since mid-April.

Police and hospital officials spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorised to talk to media.

The Americans were killed when gunmen opened fire on them in the northern Iraqi village of Hawija, according to a brief military statement.

Taiwan calls for democracy in China

AFP, Taipei

Taiwan President Ma Ying-jeou yesterday called on rival China to give freedom and democracy to its people, on the 19th anniversary of the Tiananmen Square massacre.

"I expressed my thoughts on the anniversary and attended events organised to memorise the victims. What I do care about is whether people in China can enjoy a life of freedom and democracy," Ma said.

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গণপ্রজাতন্ত্রী বাংলাদেশ সরকার ফুড সিকিউরিটি প্রোগ্রাম-২০০৬, সয়েল ফাটিলিটি কম্পোনেন্ট প্রকল্প মৃত্তিকা সম্পদ উন্নয়ন ইনস্টিটিউট কৃষি মন্ত্রণালয় কৃষি খামার সড়ক, ঢাকা-১২১৫