

Iraq bombing kills three US soldiers

AFP, Baghdad

A bomb attack in Iraq's northern Nineveh province killed three US soldiers hours after a bomb ripped through a council office in Baghdad killing four Americans, the US military said yesterday.

The three soldiers and their interpreter were killed at 10:45 pm (1945 GMT) on Tuesday, the military said without giving further details nor specifying where the attack occurred in the province.

In a separate attack in Nineveh, a car bomb exploded in the provincial capital of Mosul on Tuesday wounding 90 civilians, the military said.

It blamed al-Qaeda in Iraq operatives for the attack in Mosul city, which the military claims is the last urban bastion of the jihad group.

India, Russia to cooperate in training mountain troops

PTI, Moscow

Strategic allies India and Russia are set to boost their security ties, including sharing experience in training mountain troops and anti-terror efforts.

India, which has highly trained mountain troops, has agreed to exchange experience with Russia, currently in the process of raising mountain brigades in the restive Caucasian region, now the post-Communist nation's external frontiers in the south.

This issue was discussed yesterday during the Indian Army Chief, General Deepak Kapoor's parleys with his Russian host General Alexei Maslov, who is the Commander-in-Chief of the Land Forces.

"Gen. Maslov and his Indian colleague Gen. Kapoor agreed to establish a regular exchange of experience in training mountain troops," Land Forces spokesman Col. Igor Konashenkov said.



People walk to search for their belongings from the rubble of collapsed buildings in the worst earthquake-hit area of Beichuan county in China's Sichuan province yesterday. Local residents have been allowed to recover their belongings from the devastated city.

PHOTO: AFP

China reopens Tibet to foreign tourists

AFP, Beijing

ists," Zha said.

The successful Beijing Olympic torch relay in Lhasa on June 21 further proves that currently social stability in Tibet has been further consolidated."

Zha said two Swedish tourists would arrive in Lhasa on Wednesday, followed by four from Singapore on Sunday.

He did not mention when a ban on foreign journalists to the region would be lifted.

"Tibetan tourism is safe, Tibetans are friendly," he said in Today comments.

Beijing kicked all tourists and foreigners out of Tibet after violent protests against Chinese rule erupted in mid-March, prompting a massive Chinese security clampdown.

China allowed mainland Chinese tour groups back in at the end of April, followed by visitors from Hong Kong and Macau in

May, when it also began allowing tourists from Taiwan -- which China considers part of its territory.

"It is very hard for us to believe that China will allow free access to western tourists," Paul Bourke, the executive director of the Australia Tibet Council, told AFP.

"China has always seemed to go to great lengths to prevent Tibetans from having any contact with foreigners. We will be watching with interest to see how this so called 'opening' develops."

Burke said he continues to receive reports from Tibet about a huge military presence in the region and an ongoing police and military lockdown on Tibetan Buddhist monasteries.

Foreign tourists would likely to be watched closely and their movements would be restricted, Bourke said, citing what he said was the stage management of Saturday's torch relay in Lhasa.



Activists of radical Sikh organisations block railway tracks demanding immediate arrest of Gurmeet Ram Rahim, the chief of the spiritual organisation Dera Sacha Sauda, during a demonstration near Vallabhi Mandi on the outskirts of Amritsar yesterday. Sikh organisations blocked railway traffic throughout the state of Punjab following the death of a Sikh in Mumbai who was allegedly shot dead by Ram Rahim's bodyguard on June 20.

Iraq PM gives new deadline to Shia militants

AFP, Baghdad

Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki yesterday declared an amnesty period of one week to Shia fighters in the southern province of Maysan to surrender themselves amid an ongoing crackdown.

Prime Minister Maliki has agreed to give a period of seven days starting 10:00 am (0700 GMT) today to gunmen and outlaws to surrender themselves in Maysan, Major General Mohammed Al-Askari, spokesman for the Iraqi defence ministry told AFP.

Before the operation was launched on June 19, Maliki had given a four-day deadline for militants to surrender their weapons

African leaders meet on Zimbabwe crisis

Mugabe vows to go ahead with run-off polls

AFP, Harare

Southern African leaders met yesterday for talks on the Zimbabwe crisis as President Robert Mugabe indicated he was open to negotiations with the opposition, but only after this week's run-off election.

The talks in the Swaziland capital opened without South African President Thabo Mbeki, who has been appointed mediator for Zimbabwe by the region and has faced criticism over his quiet diplomacy approach.

South Africa said there was no need for a military intervention in Zimbabwe as the Southern African Development Community (SADC) defence and security committee -- made up of Angola, Tanzania and Swaziland -- started its meeting in the Swaziland capital.

"President Mbeki is not a member of the troika," said the president's spokesman, Mukoni Ratshitanga, adding he "has not been invited to the meeting."

But Tercy Simelane, a spokesman for Swaziland's prime minister, said though the meeting was of the troika, the "doors were open" for Mbeki to attend as a facilitator in the Zimbabwe talks.

Zimbabwe's political crisis deepened after opposition leader Morgan Tsvangirai announced he

was pulling out of Friday's presidential run-off election saying violence had made a fair vote impossible.

He said he could not ask supporters to cast ballots when it could cost them their lives.

Tsvangirai took refuge in the Dutch embassy in Harare after his announcement and has remained there for more than two days. He planned a press conference for Wednesday, though it was unclear whether he would leave the embassy.

Tsvangirai beat Mugabe in the first round of the election but did not get the majority required to take the presidency from his rival.

Mugabe, in his first direct comments on Tsvangirai's withdrawal, defied international criticism and vowed that the election would go ahead, saying the opposition chief had pulled out because he was afraid of losing.

"Other people can say what they want, but the elections are ours and we are a sovereign state," Mugabe told a rally in Banquet, north of Harare, on Tuesday.

"We will proceed with our election."

The state-run Herald newspaper on Wednesday quoted Mugabe as saying he was open to negotiations, but Friday's run-off would be held first.

Israel shuts Gaza crossings after rocket attacks

AFP, Gaza City

Gazans requiring medical care in Israel or abroad -- remained open.

Three rockets fired from the Gaza Strip hit southern Israel on Tuesday, slightly wounding two people and straining an Egyptian-brokered truce.

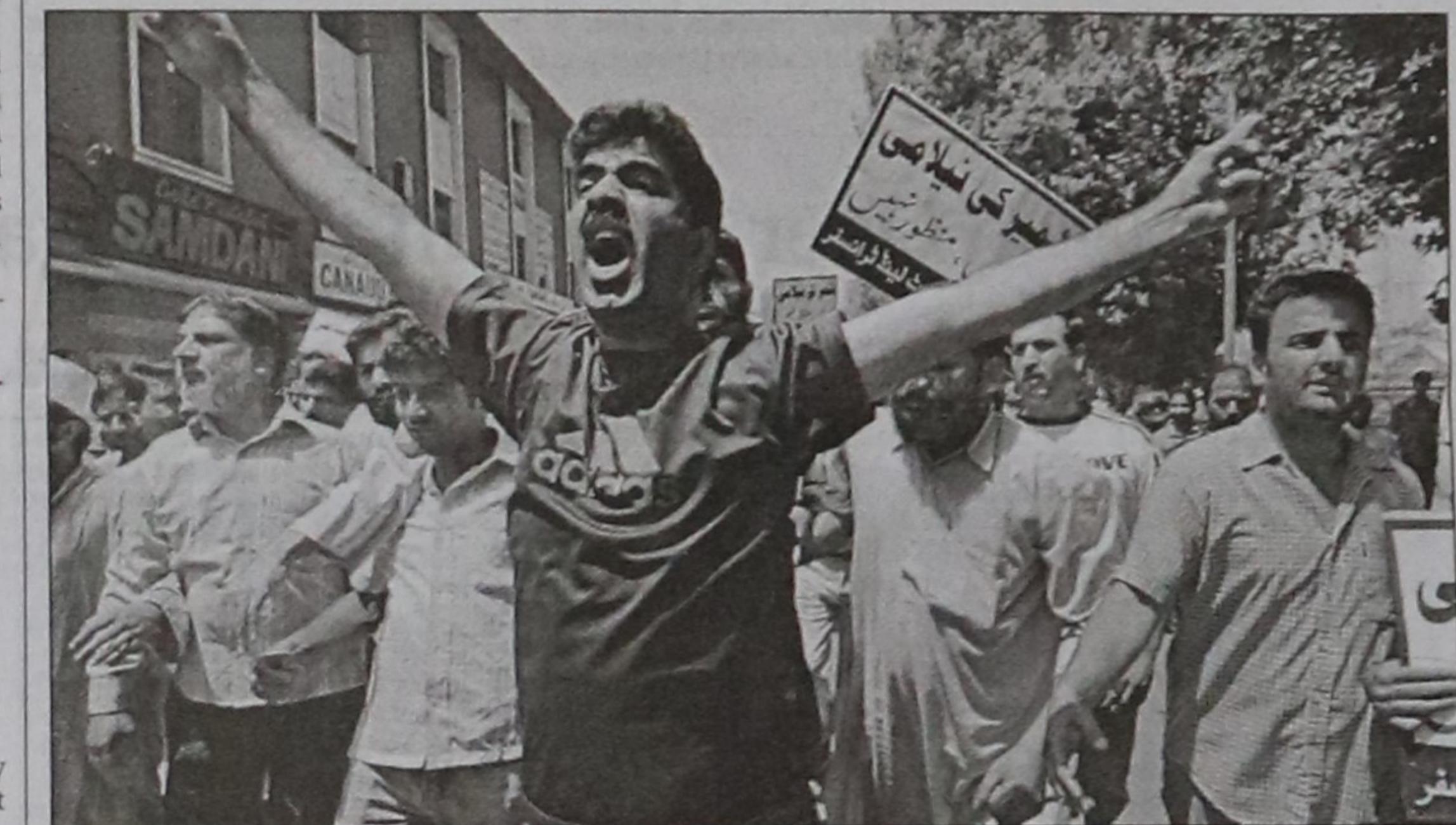
"We are keeping the Karni, Sufa and Nahal Oz crossings closed for the time being following the firing of rockets in flagrant violation of the truce deal," Israeli military spokesman Peter Lerner told AFP.

Islamic Jihad claimed responsibility for the attacks, calling them a response to the killing of one of its senior fighters in a gunbattle hours earlier in the occupied West Bank, which was not included in the truce.

The group, which regularly fired rockets and mortar rounds at southern Israel in the months leading to the ceasefire, had not agreed to the truce but vowed not to violate it.

"Any fire from the Gaza Strip is a gross violation of the understanding reached with Egypt," Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert's spokesman Mark Regev told AFP, adding that Hamas bore responsibility for any attack from Gaza.

He said the attacks violated "two cardinal points of the understandings reached through Egypt, namely that the truce applies only to the Gaza Strip and not to the West Bank and that it concerns all armed groups."



Members of the newly formed Action Committee Against Land Transfer (ACALT) shout anti-Indian slogans during a protest in Srinagar yesterday. The committee held a protest march against a government decision to transfer forestland to a Hindu shrine trust.

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