

3rd parties unlikely to be today's polls spoilers

Obama says US laws apply to his aunt living illegally



Democratic presidential nominee US Sen Barack Obama (D-IL) speaks during a campaign rally at University of Cincinnati on Sunday in Cincinnati, Ohio. Obama continues to campaign against Republican presidential nominee Sen John McCain (R-AZ) as Americans go to election today.

AP, Charlotte, North Carolina

It's lunchtime, and Mary Goode is leaning toward voting for Republican John McCain. By dinner, she admits she might be for Democrat Barack Obama.

But there's no chance that on Election Day she will be for any candidate from a third party.

"This election is too important," said Goode, a 43-year-old accountant from Charlotte. "That would just be like throwing my vote away. I'm not going to do that."

Without billionaire H. Ross Perot and his flip charts, Bill Clinton might not have won the White House in 1992. If Ralph Nader hadn't won 32,000 votes in Florida, Al Gore might have moved into the Oval Office in 2000.

But this year, neither Nader, former GOP Rep. Bob Barr running as a Libertarian or any of the other small-party candidates who have qualified for the ballot in some states appears likely to play the role of spoiler.

"In some sense, there are some purists who say you have to vote for what's right. You just can't vote for the lesser of two evils," said Dennis Goldford, a political science professor at Drake University in Iowa.

"But with the economy in the situation it's in, I don't think people feel like they have the luxury of

just shopping around. They're saying: 'Somebody has to fix this in a hurry and you know it's not going to be one of these third-party guys.'"

There is a long history of third-party candidates in presidential politics, but few that could be called a success. Among those that connected with voters are two relics of racial politics: Strom Thurmond won 39 electoral votes in 1948 on the States' Rights Democrats ticket and Alabama Gov. George Wallace's 1968 bid on the American Independent ticket captured 46 electoral votes.

"Since 1832 the birth of the modern Democratic Party only 13 times has a third-party candidate actually pulled better than 5 percent of the vote," Goldford said. "So as much as people complain about the two major parties, people tend to vote overwhelmingly for them."

Third-party candidates can affect the outcome.

While he did not win any electoral votes in 1992, Perot won 19 percent of the popular vote and helped push Clinton into office. Nader did not come close to Perot's level of support in 2000, but because it came disproportionately from voters who were otherwise likely to vote for Gore, it was enough to swing the outcome of a tight race to George W. Bush.

"It would have made a difference in Florida and New Hampshire," said Charles Pryby, a political science professor at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. "If Nader had not been on the ballot anywhere, his 2.7 percent a lion's share would have gone to Gore. And that would have put him over the top in those two states."

So is there any chance of that this year? Probably not.

Barr is on the ballot in the six states that are viewed as tossups heading into Election Day: North Carolina, Florida, Indiana, Missouri, Nevada and Ohio, worth a total of 89 electoral votes. Nader is on the ballot in four of them, and is eligible as a write-in candidate in North Carolina and Indiana.

But neither registers any significant support in recent polls conducted in those states. And unlike past third-party candidates who did well at the ballot box, neither Barr nor Nader are charismatic campaigners focused on a single issue.

"Do they represent a particular section of the country at this point? No. Have they managed to capture great popular discontent on a particular issue. No," Goldford said. "There's nothing particular that Barr or Nader is saying that resonates with these folks."

AFP, Washington

Democrat Barack Obama suggested in a television interview to be broadcast Monday that his Boston-based Kenyan aunt, who was found to be living illegally in the United States, should be deported if she broke the law.

CBS News released an advance transcript of the interview late Sunday.

"If she is violating laws, those laws have to be obeyed," Obama told CBS when asked if he would support deporting his late father's sister, Zeituni Oyanango, to Kenya.

News that Oyanango, 56, was living illegally in the northeastern city of Boston broke Friday, just days before Tuesday's presidential election which Obama faces off against Republican John McCain.

"We're a nation of laws," Obama said in the CBS interview.

"Obviously that doesn't lessen my concern for her, I haven't been able to be in touch with her. But I'm a strong believer you have to obey the law," he said.

Aides said that Obama, 47, had not been in touch with his aunt since his Senate inauguration ceremony in 2004.

Both Obama, McCain eye potential admn teams

AP, Washington

Americans will elect not only a president today, but also his huge team of aides, advisers and bureaucrats who will help the winner run the federal government for the next four years.

Clearly a John McCain presidency would be more conservative than a Barack Obama presidency. Beyond the ideological and partisan divides, however, are differences in style, tone and pedigree that would distinguish one administration from the other.

Obama, if he wins, appears likely to draw several of his top aides, including some Cabinet secretaries, from three key sources: Democratic governors midway through their second and final terms in office; former top appoint-

ees of Bill Clinton's administration; and political pros from Obama's hometown of Chicago.

McCain, a former Navy officer whose father and grandfather were admirals, is likely to rely more heavily on current and retired military officials. He probably would draw more people from the corporate world, and somewhat fewer people from think tanks and academia, than would Obama, according to people close to the candidates.

Numerous lists of potential appointees are circulating in Washington, Chicago and Arizona.

But Democratic and GOP officials warn that both nominees are fully focused on Tuesday's finish line and probably have made no firm personnel decisions about the administration they hope to run.

People close to Obama believe he would offer jobs to some or all of a quartet of Democratic governors who campaigned hard for him, even if a couple of them opposed him initially.

Two, who have thrived in Republican-leaning states Gov Janet Napolitano of Arizona and Gov Kathleen Sebelius of Kansas backed Obama from the start. Napolitano is seen as a possible attorney general. Sebelius is mentioned as a possible secretary of Education, Commerce, Energy or Health and Human Services.

Gov Ed Rendell of Pennsylvania is seen as a possible pick for the top Energy or Transportation posts. Gov Bill Richardson of New Mexico, who sought the presidential nomination himself, is thought to be on a short list for secretary of state.

From pigs to gay marriage, US voters have lots to decide

AFP, Chicago

From protecting pregnant pigs to banning gay marriage and abortion or boosting the use of renewable energy: US voters will have more decisions on Tuesday to make than just picking their president.

Some 153 such questions have been placed on statewide ballots this year and voters will face scores more from their municipal or county governments.

Many of the ballot measures are mandated by state law, but others are "citizen initiatives" pushed by a variety of special interest groups.

The initiative movement came up as a way to provide an outlet when the legislature is not responding to popular demand," said Jennie Drage Bowser, a policy analyst at the National Conference of State Legislatures.

"What's on the ballot reflects what Americans are thinking about and talking about," she explained. "In the 1930s it was labour issues,

If you look at what's been on the ballot in the last five years it's same sex marriage and the minimum wage."

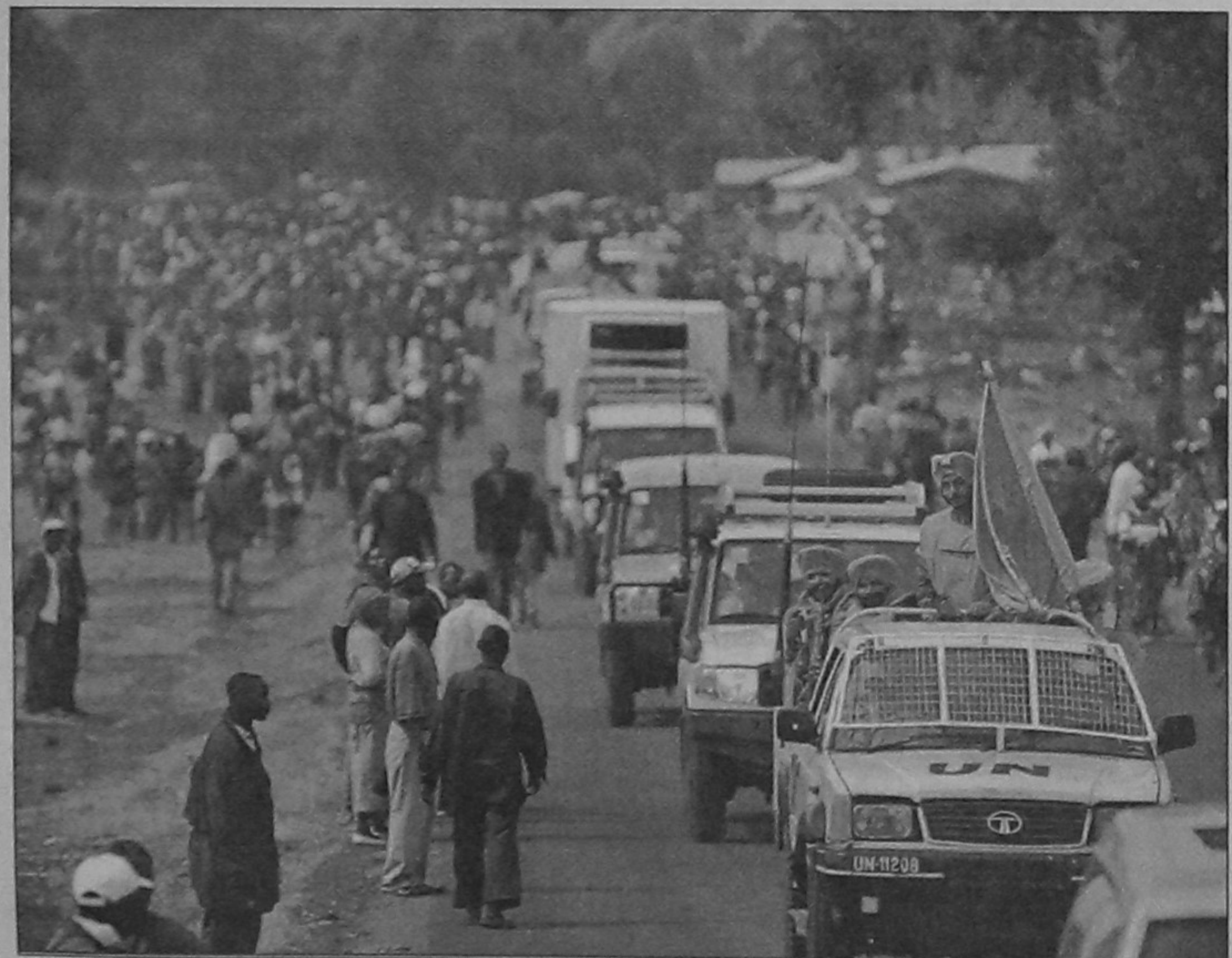
The Humane Society is responsible for getting Californians to consider a new law protecting pregnant pigs, egg-laying hens and calves raised for veal from being kept in cages so cramped they cannot move around, stand or lie down.

A coalition of conservative groups is trying to reverse a recent California Supreme Court ruling that it is unconstitutional to ban gay marriage with an initiative to amend the state constitution to define marriage as only between a man and a woman.

California also has initiatives, which would decriminalise the possession of small quantities of marijuana and expand drug treatment for criminals, increase the use of renewable energy, and require a waiting period and parental notification for teenagers seeking an abortion.



People listen as Democratic presidential nominee US Sen Barack Obama (D-IL) speaks during a campaign rally at the Cleveland Mall on Sunday in Cleveland, Ohio.



A United Nations convoy, heading to Rutshuru to relaunch UN operations in the area, crosses the Internally Displaced People (IDP's) provisional camp in Kibati, 10 km north of the provincial capital of Goma in DR Congo yesterday.

Rebel chief Nkunda warns DR Congo government UN aid convoy heads for rebel-held town

AFP, Kichanga/Goma

The rebel chief in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, Laurent Nkunda, threatened to drive the government from power unless it held direct talks on his demands.

The renegade Tutsi general told a group of journalists Sunday, at his stronghold in Kichanga, that he was waiting for a response from Kinshasa to his offer of talks.

He added that if the government refused to negotiate his rebel forces would drive them out of power.

Kichanga is in a remote area of Nord-Kivu province without telephone coverage, some 80km northwest of the provincial capital Goma.

Nkunda said his troops at the gates of Goma and had infiltrated

Goma airport.

He said he ordered his troops to halt their advance because he saw the suffering of people in Goma, and declared a unilateral ceasefire on Wednesday.

Kinshasa has accused Rwanda's ethnic Tutsi-dominated regime of backing Nkunda's National Congress for the Defence of the People (CNDP) in fighting with the army.

Rwanda denies the charge, but analysts say the Kigali government -- frustrated by its neighbour's failure to disarm a Rwandan Hutu rebel group that is harbouring perpetrators of the 1994 genocide against Tutsis -- is helping Nkunda.

Meanwhile, a UN humanitarian aid convoy set off Monday for a rebel-held town with the first sup-

plies in a week for those displaced by conflict in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo.

The dozen or so vehicles left Goma at about 9:00 am (0700 GMT) for Rutshuru, 75 kilometres (45 miles) to the north, escorted by about 50 UN peacekeepers in trucks.

It was carrying a small amount of water and medical supplies, but UN officials were to size up the possibility of sending bigger convoys through rebel territory, UN humanitarian official Gloria Fernandez said.

"At the moment, we are sending a team to see if it is possible to bring things to Rutshuru in the coming days," added Theo Kapuku, national programme officer for the United Nations' World Food Programme.

Flood of wounded GIs swamps care units

AP, Fort Campbell

In a rush to correct reports of substandard care for wounded soldiers, the Army flung open the doors of new specialized treatment centres so wide that up to half the soldiers currently enrolled do not have injuries serious enough to justify being there, The Associated Press has learned.

Army leaders are putting in place stricter screening procedures to stem the flood of patients overwhelming the units a move that eventually will target some for closure.

According to interviews and data provided to the AP, the number of patients admitted to the 36 Warrior Transition Units and nine other community-based units jumped from about 5,000 in June 2007, when they began, to a peak of nearly 12,500 in June 2008.

The units provide coordinated medical and mental health care, track soldiers' recov-

ery and provide broader legal, financial and other family counselling. They serve Army active duty and reserve soldiers.

Just 12 percent of the soldiers in the units had battlefield injuries while thousands of others had minor problems that did not require the complex new network of case managers, nurses and doctors, according to Brig Gen Gary H. Cheek, the director of the Army's warrior care office.

The overcrowding was a "self-inflicted wound," said Cheek, who also is an assistant surgeon general. "We're dedicating this kind of oversight and management where, truthfully, only half of those soldiers really needed this."

Cheek said it is difficult to tell how many patients eventually will be in the units. But he said soldiers currently admitted will not be tossed out if they do not meet the new standards. Instead, the tighter screening will weed out the population over time.

Onslaught of dirty tricks to keep US voters away

AP, Washington

In the hours before Election Day, as inevitable as winter, comes an onslaught of dirty tricks confusing e-mails, disturbing phone calls and insinuating fliers left on doorsteps during the night.

The intent, almost always, is to keep folks from voting or to confuse them, usually through intimidation or misinformation. But in this presidential race, in which a black man leads most polls, some of the deceit has a decidedly racist bent.

Complaints have surfaced in predominantly African-American neighbourhoods of Philadelphia where fliers had circulated, warning voters they could be arrested at the polls if they had unpaid parking tickets or if they had criminal convictions.

Over the weekend in Virginia, bogus fliers with an authentic-looking commonwealth seal said fears of high voter turnout had prompted election officials to hold

two elections one on Tuesday for Republicans and another on Wednesday for Democrats.

In New Mexico, two Hispanic women filed a lawsuit last week claiming they were harassed by a private investigator working for a Republican lawyer who came to their homes and threatened to call immigration authorities, even though they are US citizens.

"He was questioning her status, saying that he needed to see her papers and documents to show that she was a US citizen and was a legitimate voter," said Guadalupe Bojorquez, speaking on behalf of her mother, Dora Escobedo, a 67-year-old Albuquerque resident who speaks only Spanish. "He totally, totally scared the heck out of her."

In Pennsylvania, e-mails appeared linking Democrat Barack Obama to the Holocaust. "Jewish Americans cannot afford to make the wrong decision on Tuesday, Nov. 4," said the electronic message, paid for by an entity calling

itself the Republican Federal Committee. "Many of our ancestors ignored the warning signs in the 1930s and 1940s and made a tragic mistake."

Laughlin McDonald, who leads the ACLU's Voting Rights Project, said he has never seen "an election where there was more interest and more voter turnout, and more efforts to suppress registration and turnout. And that has a real impact on minorities."

The Obama campaign and civil rights advocacy groups have signed up millions of new voters for this presidential race. In Ohio alone, some 600,000 have submitted new voter registration cards.

Across the country, many of these first-time voters are young and strong Obama supporters. Many are also black and Hispanic.

Activist groups say it is this fresh crop of ballot-minded citizens that makes some Republicans very nervous. And they say they expect the dirty tricks to get dirtier in final hours before Tuesday.

Iraqi minister escapes Baghdad bombing String of bombings kill 9

AFP, AP, Baghdad

Iraq's Deputy Oil Minister Saheb Salman Qutub survived an assassination attempt yesterday as the Iraqi capital was hit by three bomb attacks, killing nine people and wounding at least 20 more.

Qutub, who oversees the country's crude oil production, was leaving his home in the northern neighbourhood of Ataifiyah when the roadside bomb detonated, the ministry and police said.

"He escaped the assassination attempt by improvised explosive device close to his house on Monday morning," a ministry statement said.

Qutub was treated for minor injuries at a nearby hospital and discharged, it said. His more seriously wounded driver was hospitalized.

The attack came after two almost simultaneous rush hour bombings hit Baghdad's central commercial district of Karrada, killing six people and wounding at least 20 others.

Security officials said insurgents had set the two bombs near the office of the police crime investigation unit. The force of the blasts blew out store windows in the busy retail area.

Another bomb exploded around noon near a police patrol in west Baghdad, injuring one policeman and a civilian, police said.

In Baquba, some 35 miles northeast of the capital, a car bomb exploded in a parking lot across the street from the Diyala provincial council headquarters, killing two policemen and a 10-year-old girl, authorities said.



An Iraqi police van burns as an army officer runs carrying gas cylinders following a car bomb blast in the north-eastern city of Baquba, 60 km from the capital Baghdad yesterday. Several people were killed and some nine others injured in the explosion.