

Blast at market kills 44 in Iraq

REUTERS, Diwaniya

A bomb in a small truck exploded in a market in the Iraqi city of Diwaniya yesterday, killing 40 people, and a bomb blast killed four more near the city of Kerbala, police and officials said - the latest in a series of sectarian attacks.

The Diwaniya bombing was near a Shi'ite mosque where pilgrims gather on their way to Kerbala to celebrate the birthday of one of the most important imams, al-Mahdi, this week.

In Diwaniya, 150 km south of Baghdad and 130 km south east of Kerbala, police announced a partial curfew and blocked all entrances to the city as they searched for more explosives. Two police sources said 75 people had been wounded.

Iran, US flex muscles in gulf

Tehran accuses world powers of dragging feet in talks

AFP, Tehran

Iran and the United States yesterday underlined their military readiness for conflict should faltering diplomacy over Tehran's atomic activities fail, as tensions rose over tougher Western sanctions.

Iran said it successfully fired several dozen missiles -- including a medium-range Shahab-3 ballistic weapon with a range capable of striking Israel -- in war games in its central desert region designed to show its capacity for counter-attack.

US officials, meanwhile, detailed a quiet US military build-up in the Gulf region that includes the deployment of warships and F-22 stealth fighter jets.

The belligerent posturing came on the day technical experts from Iran and from world powers, including the United States, were due to meet in Istanbul in the latest round of talks.

The negotiations have been downgraded from a senior political level after three previous rounds this

year that failed to bridge vast differences held by each side.

Iran refuses to bow to Western demands that it curb its sensitive uranium enrichment under the pressure of punishing economic sanctions that were ramped up last week to their most severe level so far.

"The sanctions imposed against our country are the harshest and strongest ever imposed. If the enemies think they can weaken Iran with these sanctions, they are wrong," Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was quoted as saying by the official IRNA news agency.

Tehran is demanding its "right" to enrichment be recognised and the "hostile" sanctions be eased for the talks to progress. It rejects Western suspicions that it is seeking a nuclear weapons "break-out" capability.

Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Salehi, speaking on Monday to the ISNA news agency, said that,

should the talks collapse, "the other alternative is confrontation."

Israel, which is not party to the talks, has warned it could launch pre-emptive air strikes on Iran's nuclear facilities to hinder what it sees as a threat by the Islamic republic to its existence.

US President Barack Obama has also repeatedly said that "all options" -- including that of US military action -- are on the table regarding Iran.

With that in mind, Iran yesterday test-fired missiles into its central desert region in war games dubbed "Grand Prophet 7" and meant to simulate counter-attacks on US military bases in Afghanistan and other neighbouring countries, and possibly on Israel.

"The message of these Grand Prophet 7 manoeuvres is to show the determination, the will and the power of the Iranian people in defending their national interests and vital values," the number two of the elite Revolutionary Guards,

General Hossein Salami, said, according to IRNA.

"It's a reaction to those who are politically discourteous to the Iranian people by saying 'all options are on the table'," he said.

Some 120 lawmakers in Iran's 290-seat parliament have also signed on to a draft bill calling for the strategic Strait of Hormuz at the entrance to the oil-rich Gulf to be closed to oil tankers headed to Europe in retaliation for an EU embargo on Iranian crude that came into effect on Sunday.

US officials responded to the announcement of the Iranian manoeuvres with comments to The New York Times newspaper stressing that Washington would view any attempt by Iran to close the Strait of Hormuz as a "red line" triggering a US military reaction.

"The message to Iran is, 'Don't even think about it,'" the daily quoted a senior Defense Department official as saying on condition of anonymity.



Iran launches long-range Shahab-1 missile yesterday during the second day of military exercises, codenamed Great Prophet-7. PHOTO: AFP

Mideast peace process a 'trick': Richard Falk

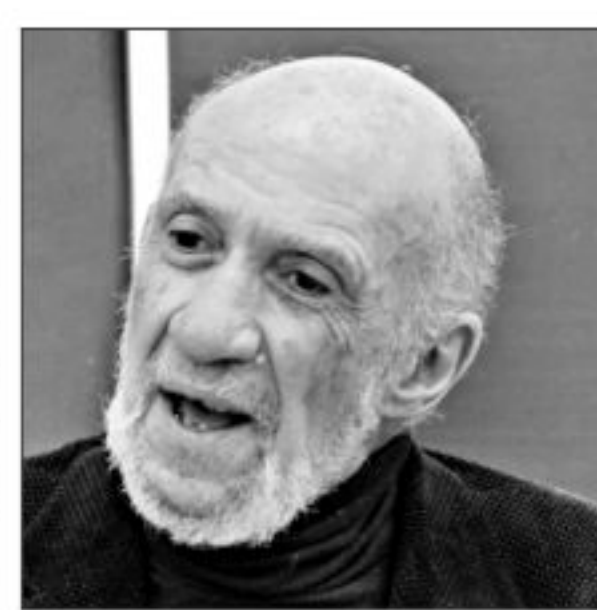
AFP, Geneva

The UN pointman for Palestinian human rights launched a blistering attack on the international community yesterday, accusing it of conspiring in Israeli settlement policies and branding the peace process a "trick".

Richard Falk, the special UN rapporteur for human rights in the occupied territories, also took aim at the so-called Middle East Quartet's peace envoy Tony Blair over his efforts in the region.

Falk, who spoke to reporters after addressing the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva, said Palestinians in the occupied West Bank were offered no protection in Israeli law and that their treatment was akin to apartheid.

"I think one has to begin to call the reality by a name," he said, likening the "discriminatory dualistic legal system" in the West



Bank to the former system in South Africa.

In his report to the council, Falk expressed his concern about Israel's use of administrative detention, the expansion of settlements and violence by settlers.

"The peace process is a trick rather than a way to find a solution to the problem," Falk said.

He also criticised the work of the former British prime minister Tony Blair in the region.

"Tony Blair has not much to show for his 86 visits to the Middle East... (it is) an extension of the peace process which I regard as a failure because while time passes the settlement culture continues."

"The international community is conspiring -- maybe unwittingly -- in a process that has no way of bringing justice to the people involved in this conflict," he said of settlements.

Dispute hits UN arms treaty talks

AFP, United Nations

Talks on the \$70 billion a year global arms trade talks hit deadlock before starting Monday amid a diplomatic battle over Palestinian representation.

Arab demands that Palestinians be allowed to take part led to a threat of an Israeli walkout and a block on European Union presence at the conference, diplomats said.

Talks among the 193 United Nations members were meant to have started on Monday morning and gone on until July 27 to come up with a draft arms trade treaty.

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon called off his opening speech and it was not clear when the talks would

Suu Kyi defiant in 'Burma' row

Regime releases political prisoners

AFP, Yangon

Opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi yesterday brushed off orders from Myanmar's government to stop calling the country "Burma", a name widely used by democracy campaigners to defy the former junta.

The old regime changed the country's official name some two decades ago to Myanmar, saying "Burma" was a relic from British colonial rule and implied the diverse land belonged only to the Burman ethnic majority.

The country's election commission castigated Suu Kyi last week for repeatedly using the term during recent overseas trips, accusing her and the opposition National League for Democracy (NLD) of flouting the constitution.

But a defiant Suu Kyi told reporters in Yangon that she would call the country

whatever she liked.

"In a democratic nation, things should be done after viewing the desire of the people," she said, adding the army had renamed the country without consultation.

"Freedom of speech... and the right to speak one's mind freely doesn't insult anyone. This is also about democratic principles and policy."

"So I assume that I can use whatever I want to use as I believe in democracy."

Meanwhile, around 20 political prisoners were included in a Myanmar jail amnesty announced in official media yesterday, democracy activists said, amid calls for all dissidents to be freed.

The 88 Generation Students Group, which played a key part in a 1988 uprising against the former junta, said political inmates held around the country were among a group of 46 prisoners authorities

Pakistan re-opening Nato supply routes

AFP, Washington

Pakistan is re-opening vital Nato supply routes into Afghanistan closed since a deadly November attack, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said yesterday, adding the US was sorry for the loss of life.

During a telephone conversation with her Pakistani counterpart Foreign Minister Hina Rabbani Khar, she "informed me that the ground supply lines into Afghanistan are opening," Hillary said.

Islamabad had long said that Washington must apologize for the air raid that killed 24 Pakistani soldiers before it would re-open the routes, closed in anger after

Mollah-backed Razakars

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Abdul Quader Mollah.

"Abdul Quader Mollah also took part in the meeting which decided to kill the unarmed people and the decision was executed on November 25, 1971," Mozaffar said quoting Abdul Majid, a witness of Ghatarchar massacre who informed him soon after the atrocity.

After recording the statement, the three-member tribunal led by its chairman Justice ATM Fazle Kabir adjourned the case proceedings until July 8 following a time petition of the defence counsels. Mozaffar will face cross-examination on that day.

On May 28, the tribunal framed six specific charges against the assistant secretary general of Jamaat-e-Islami for his alleged involvement in murders and mass killings during the Liberation War. Quader Mollah was produced at the court yesterday.

Mozaffar said he was the president of Keraniganj Thana of East Pakistan Chhatra League in 1969 and an SSC examinee during the war.

After having training in India, Mozaffar, who led a group of freedom fighters entered back into Bangladesh in August, 1971, set up a camp at Kalatia in Keraniganj on the outskirts of the capital.

Mozaffar said, in the early morning of November 25, 1971, they heard gunshots and he along with his troops marched towards Ghatarchar, from where the sounds were coming.

"On the way, I happened to bump into my father and my father prevented me from going towards Ghatarchar," said Mozaffar, adding, "Because they [local collaborators] first attacked our house and set fire to it."

"My father told me that they [local collaborators] had killed freedom fighters Osman Gani and Golam Mostafa," said the witness, adding, "My father told me that I should not open fire at this moment with the arms I had."

Mozaffar said the assault went on from early morning to 11:00am and they killed 57 people in Ghatarchar and afterwards they launched an attack on Bhawal Khan Bari and killed 25 people there. They also set fire to homes after looting them, said the witness.

"When I went to the Bhawal Khan Bari, I saw that my house was burning and the bodies of Osman Gani and Golam Mostafa were lying on the ground," said Mozaffar, adding that Osman Gani was his nephew.

Mozaffar said later on he and his troops went to the Ghatarchar area using an alternative route. "I was horrified; blood and dead bodies all around," said Mozaffar.

He said local Taiyab Ali and Abdul Majid, acquaintances of Mozaffar, and others were trying to identify Muslim and Hindu bodies.

When Mozaffar asked about what had happened, Majid told him about the meeting held with the conviction of Quader Mollah on November 23 or 24, 1971, and the decision of the meeting.

Mozaffar also said he had once gone to Mohamadpur in the capital, to his maternal uncle's house, during the Liberation War in disguise and when he was returning, he saw armed Quader Mollah standing in front of Mohamadpur Physical Training Centre along with accomplices.

The training centre had

been used as the torture cell of the Razakars and Al-Badr [two auxiliary forces of the Pakistani army] during the war, said Mozaffar.

Mozaffar said he had taken part in the 1970 election campaigns for the Awami League-blessed candidates of Keraniganj, Mohamadpur and Mirpur. During then he had seen Quader Mollah campaigning for Ghulam Azam, the then ameer of East Pakistan Jamaat-e-Islami and a candidate from Mohamadpur and Mirpur area.

Mozaffar said he had been demanding trial of war criminals for many years and worked with Ekattorer Ghatok Dalal Nirmul Committee to press home his demand.

According to The Daily Star archives, on December 17, 2007, Mozaffar filed a case against Jamaat leaders Motiur Rahman Nizami, Ali Ahsan Mohammad Mojaheed, Abdul Quader Mollah and six other Jamaat men in connection with the killing of his nephew Osman Gani and fellow freedom fighter Golam Mostafa on November 25, 1971.

The case was filed with Dhaka Chief Judicial Magistrate Court, he said at the tribunal yesterday.

Mozaffar was giving his deposition fast and the tribunal was recording it but a few sentences he had said did not have clear meaning when written down. At one point the tribunal suggested excluding those lines.

Mozaffar was upset with this and said, "I am not any paid witness; I have come to the court voluntarily for giving my statement. I have to be allowed to speak..."

At this moment, Chief Prosecutor Ghulam Arief Tipoo and other prosecutors calmed him down and the



India's Uttar Pradesh state Chief Minister Akhilesh Yadav embraces Indian presidential candidate Pranab Mukherjee, centre, while Samajwadi Party chief Mulayam Singh Yadav looks on during a meeting in Lucknow yesterday. PHOTO: AFP

Syria troops pound Homs, 48 killed

AFP, Beirut

Syrian troops pounded several rebel-held districts in the central city of Homs yesterday, as the death toll mounted across the country, said the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.

In total, at least 48 people were killed yesterday, bringing to more than 120 the death toll over two days, the Britain-based watchdog reported.

Two civilians and three rebels were killed in Homs, as clashes raged in and around the neighbourhood of Baba Amr, a former rebel stronghold that the army seized on March 1 after a fierce 27-day assault.

Earlier, the Observatory reported at least 78 people were confirmed killed across Syria on Monday, 44 of them civilians.

Pranab's nomination accepted

Sangma's objections rejected

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

The attempt to scuttle Pranab Mukherjee's presidential bid failed yesterday with the returning officer rejecting the objection of his opponent PA Sangma who had raked up the issue of office of profit.

With this, Mukherjee and Sangma, whose nomination papers were found to be in order this morning, will fight it out in a direct contest in the poll scheduled for July 19.

Raja Sabha secretary general V K Agnihotri, who is the returning officer for the election, accepted the arguments on behalf of Mukherjee that he had resigned the post of chairman of the Indian Statistical Institute (ISI) on June 20, eight days before he filed his nomination.

Parliamentary affairs minister PK Bansal, who appeared as Mukherjee's representative along with home minister P Chidambaram before the returning officer, told reporters later that Agnihotri accepted the argument that the resignation was forwarded to the president of the institute.

The RO ruled in favour of Mukherjee and accepted his nomination papers, Bansal said.

During scrutiny yesterday, Sangma had filed a petition demanding rejection of Mukherjee's nomination contending that he suffered disqualification because he held an office of profit by remaining as the chairman of the ISI at the time of filing of nominations.

Beware of mobile hackers

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Zia Ahmed, chairman of the Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC), said, "We have heard about mobile fraudulence that has been covered by some local media following the news in the Indian media."

A team of the BTRC was studying the matter, he said, adding that if it got something then the BTRC would talk to the operators about it.

Calls from numbers beginning with +92, #92 or 09 unique code might be harmful for call recipients, said an official of the BTRC.

Another expert said it was technologically possible for a hacker to see or get access to a mobile handset's data remotely. It was a security matter and all devices could not provide the same level of security, the expert said.

People should not keep any confidential data such as PIN code, bank account numbers in their handsets, as those could be hacked. Even a music track could be

copied remotely.

If the device has internet access then the security concerns become more serious, the expert said.

The mobile operators have the scope to work on it by self regulation. They could block unique numbers or calls from fake sources, the expert said.

The operators could block all spam calls or texts and the operators should have a protection mechanism first to introduce the system, the expert said.

Some months ago a number of calls and texts were made to subscribers from fake numbers or numbers that had not been authenticated. The operators were quick to fix the problem.

Tanveer Mohammad, chief technology officer of Grameenphone, said, "We have taken the matter seriously and we are working on this."

According to technology websites, smartphones could be hacked by using e-mails, social networking, applica-

Fire kills 5

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Mohammad Faruk. They were aged between 24 and 40, reported Malaysian newspaper The Star.

All these five workers hailed from Nabinagar upazila of Brahmanbaria, reported a correspondent of the district.

Selangor Fire and Rescue Department operations head Mohamad Sani Harul said the workers had died around 3:00am. They were trapped in two rooms upstairs of a double-storey terrace house and could not open the iron window grilles to get out.

They had been staying there with two other Bangladeshis. The other two managed to escape.

The details on how the fire started could not be known immediately, he added.

Calls for EU exit get louder in UK

REUTERS, London

Senior British lawmakers warned on Monday that Britain must consider a future outside the European Union as the 17 members of Europe's currency union, which the UK has stayed out of, develop closer fiscal and political ties.

"I do not believe that Britain's national interest is served by its current relationship with the EU," Britain's former defence secretary Liam Fox said in a speech offering support to growing calls for a national vote on the issue.

British Prime Minister David appeared to rule out a referendum on the issue on Friday, saying "Europe" and "referendum" could go together.