

# US says arrests members of Saddam security detail

WASHINGTON, July 25 (Reuters) - U.S. forces, acting on a tip from an informant, have arrested several men believed to be part of former Iraqi President Saddam Hussein's personal security detachment during a raid south of Tikrit, a senior U.S. military commander said on Friday.

"I believe that we continue to tighten the noose," Maj. Gen. Ray Odierno, commander of the U.S. Army's 4th Infantry Division, told reporters at the Pentagon during a teleconference from Tikrit. "I

believe that we continue to gain more and more information about where he might be."

U.S. forces, also acting on information from an informant, killed Saddam's two sons during a raid on Tuesday in Mosul.

Odierno said an informant came forward to members of a U.S. Army brigade in Tikrit, hometown of Saddam, and volunteered information that led to a raid conducted on Thursday night on a house located south of the city.

He said U.S. forces detained 13

people, adding that "somewhere between five and 10 of those, we're still sorting through it, are believed to be Saddam Hussein's personal security detachment."

Odierno said that these men are now being interrogated. He said he could not say how recently the men were with Saddam and did not indicate that finding Saddam was imminent. U.S. officials have said they believe Saddam is hiding somewhere inside Iraq, and that they are confident that they will find him.



The amphibious assault ship USS Iwo Jima, leading a three-ship group carrying 2,300 Marines, has entered the Mediterranean Sea for possible duty in a Liberia operation, the Pentagon said July 24, 2003. The Iwo Jima is shown in the Gulf on June 29, 2003. REUTERS

# Reuters sees touched up bodies of Saddam sons

BAGHDAD, July 25 (Reuters) - U.S. forces in Iraq partly rebuilt the faces of two bodies shown to journalists on Friday in an effort to convince Iraqis that the battle-scarred corpses were those of Saddam Hussein's widely feared sons.

I was one of 15 journalists shown into an air-conditioned, khaki tent at Baghdad airport to view the corpses. They did look like the brothers, who U.S. troops said they killed during a siege on Tuesday.

Arabic networks al-Jazeera, Abu Dhabi Television and other broadcasters began showing the bodies identified as Uday and Qusay, laid out at the makeshift airport morgue.

A U.S. military official said "facial reconstruction" was used to repair wounds, particularly to the face of the elder son Uday, which had disfigured the bodies shown originally to the public in photographs taken by soldiers after the battle.

An uncharacteristic beard on the

body of Qusay, seen in those U.S. pictures, had been shaved off, leaving a moustache.

Inside the tent, U.S. officials said it was standard practice to use morticians putty to prepare bodies for viewing and was not intended to fool the Iraqi people.

But while it may be common in the United States, the move is unheard of in the Arab world. That could affect Washington's efforts to quash Iraqi conspiracy theories that the bodies are not in fact those of the once powerful and hated sons of Saddam, who is believed to be still in hiding in Iraq.

U.S. officials have already played down the importance of visually identifying the men, saying their dental and medical records positively identified the brothers. Four top Saddam aides have also made positive identification, they say.

"You can make anyone look like anyone else," one U.S. official said, insisting the medical evi-

dence was compelling.

The brothers were lying side-by-side on metal trolleys, their bruised bodies, riddled with bullets and shrapnel, naked apart from a blue cloth that covered their genitals.

Autopsies had been performed on both men and large Y-shape incisions bound by black stitches marked their torsos.

Uday still wore his beard. A hole in the top of his skull was left untouched. U.S. officials said they had no evidence to support suggestions that he had shot himself to avoid capture.

A faint smell of disinfectant hung in the air.

Journalists were shown a metal orthopaedic plate that officials said they had removed from Uday's left leg and were told that its serial number matched that of a disc that was inserted in his limb after a failed 1996 assassination attempt.

# Israel pledges to pull back from two West Bank cities

JERUSALEM, July 25 (Reuters) - Israel pledged on Friday to pull back from two West Bank cities and release hundreds of Palestinian prisoners in an apparent bid to blunt the impact of a White House visit by Palestinian Prime Minister Mahmoud Abbas.

But the killing of a five-year-old Palestinian boy in what the army called an accident embarrassed Israel hours before Abbas, on his first prime ministerial visit to Washington, was to lobby for swifter Israeli steps along a "road map" to peace.

A statement issued by Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's office listed moves Israel planned to take "to advance negotiations" with the Palestinian Authority on implementing the U.S.-backed peace plan affirmed at a Middle East summit on June 4.

Many of the steps, however, had already been announced, such as Israel's intention to hand over more

West Bank cities to Palestinian security control following a troop pullout several weeks ago from Bethlehem.

"Israel will transfer security responsibility for two additional (West Bank) cities," the statement said.

"The names of the cities...and a date for their transfer will be decided at a meeting early next week between (Israeli) Defence Minister Shaul Mofaz and (Palestinian) Security Affairs Minister Mohammed Dahlan."

The statement reaffirmed Israel's plan to release hundreds of Palestinian prisoners in what it sees as a step that will boost Abbas's popularity among Palestinians and support for the moderate leader's peace efforts.

But there apparently will be no release before Sharon returns from his own talks with U.S. President George W. Bush in Washington on Tuesday, and the figure failed to

meet Palestinian demands for freedom for all 6,000 prisoners in Israeli custody.

There was also no reference to the peace plan's call for a halt to the expansion of Jewish settlements on occupied land in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

The Israeli steps were largely limited to removing three major army checkpoints in the West Bank and giving 8,500 additional work permits in Israel to Palestinians.

In an apparent attempt to soothe concerns over a fence Israel is building in the West Bank, Sharon's office said he was reviewing ways to reduce hardships for Palestinians caused by the structure.

The fence, which Israel says is vital to stop suicide bombers entering its cities, encroaches deep into the West Bank. Palestinians fear Israel is trying to pre-determine borders of a state whose creation the peace plan envisages by 2005.

# Three kidnapped judges die in Pakistan jail shootout

ISLAMABAD, July 25 (Reuters) - Three kidnapped judges and five prisoners were killed in Pakistan on Friday when police raided a jail to free seven judges taken hostage by the prisoners, police said.

The judges had been taken hostage

by armed prisoners while visiting the main jail in Sialkot town. Police said up to three judges were wounded in the gunbattle but all the survivors were freed.

The prisoners, some of whom are serving sentences for kidnapping peo-

ple for ransom, were demanding their freedom in return for that of the judges, police said.

"Three judges and all five kidnapers have been killed during the operation," Amjad Javed Saleemi, police superintendent in Sialkot, told Reuters.

# NATO draws blank on who killed newsman in Kosovo

BRUSSELS, July 25 (Reuters) - A NATO probe into who was responsible for a mortar-shelling incident which killed a British television producer and two Kosovo Albanians in 2001 has ended without a verdict, the alliance said on Friday.

"NATO has made every effort to resolve this issue but regrets it has not received the necessary information that would allow it to answer the outstanding questions," a report posted on NATO's website (www.nato.int) said.

Briton Kerem Lawton, a 30-year-old producer for Associated Press Television News, was killed when a mortar bomb struck a vehicle he was parking in the remote Kosovo village of Krivenik, just across the border from Macedonia.

An initial investigation by NATO's KFOR peace mission in Kosovo had concluded that mortar rounds which struck Krivenik that day had come from the direction of Macedonia.

# Afghans take over Belgian church in asylum protest

BRUSSELS, July 25 (Reuters) - About 300 Afghans have occupied a church and gone on a hunger strike to protest at the Belgian government's decision to reject asylum requests filed by hundreds more of their people.

Men, women, and children have peacefully occupied St Croix Church in Brussels since Thursday, demanding the government reverse its decision and not oblige the asylum seekers to go back to Afghanistan.

"It's still too dangerous," Assefi Mohammed Taher, one of the organisers of the protest, told Reuters. Taher said the protesters would stay in the church until the government had changed its mind.

The protest is reminiscent of migrants occupying a church in the French port of Calais last November. Police eventually evicted the migrants, who had hoped to go through the nearby Channel Tunnel and claim asylum in Britain.

Britain recently repatriated more than 40 Afghans asylum seekers as part of a tough policy that deems the country safe.

Some stability has gradually returned to parts of Afghanistan since U.S.-led forces ousted the Taliban regime in 2001. But human rights groups have condemned repatriation and said conditions were not yet appropriate for people to go back.

Pascal Smet, head of the Belgian government's refugee processing centre, said more than 800 requests filed by Afghans had been rejected.

But Smet said the centre would give them a year to leave Belgium and go back to their country on their own accord.

Europe is struggling to manage a tide of asylum seekers to EU countries, some of whom have been accused of sneaking into Europe with the help of human traffickers to seek economic benefits rather than fleeing persecution at home.

# Indian troops kill Kashmir rebels, warn of trouble

JAMMU, India, July 25 (Reuters) - Indian troops killed 14 Muslim rebels, including 10 men who tried to enter Kashmir from Pakistan on Friday, police said, a day after the army warned that separatists could step up attacks to derail peace efforts.

Indian and Pakistani forces also exchanged mortar and machinegun fire along the border overnight, but there were no reports of injuries or damage, an Indian defence official said.

Police said five rebels were killed as they tried to flee after refusing to surrender near the border about 25 km (15 miles) from Jammu, winter capital of Jammu and Kashmir state.

In a second incident, five militants were shot dead after they crossed a military ceasefire line in Kupwara district northwest of Srinagar, summer capital of the state.

Elsewhere, four militants, three soldiers and three civilians were killed in separate incidents of violence across the state, a police spokesman said.

Almost 20 people died in two major raids in Kashmir this week — one on pilgrims, another on an army base — but Pakistan and India have vowed to continue efforts to improve ties after coming close to their third war over the Himalayan region last year.

## World News Highlights

**MONROVIA** - Mortar bombs pounded Liberia's capital, killing at least 12 in a besieged city where terrified people poised on the edge of a humanitarian disaster begged for help from foreign troops.


**RIYADH** - A Saudi official dismissed a U.S. congressional report implying that Riyadh had a role in the September 11, 2001 attacks, saying the claims came from Democrats trying to discredit President George W. Bush ahead of the 2004 election.

**HONIARA** - A Solomon Islands police officer was beaten and bloodied when he tried to break up a fight among suspected militia members,

the first full day of operations for a 2,225-strong Australian-led force sent to restore order.

**ROSTOV-ON-DON, Russia** - A Russian court sentenced an army colonel to 10 years in jail for the murder of a young Chechen woman in a high-profile case seen as a test of Moscow's commitment to punishing abuses in Chechnya.


**HONG KONG** - Beijing's mouthpiece in Hong Kong launched a scathing attack against the outspoken leader of Hong Kong's Catholic church, accusing him of causing trouble and stirring up anti-government sentiment.



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