

New Saddam tape forecasts defeat for US, British forces

DUBAI, Aug 1 (Reuters) - A new audiotape purportedly from Saddam Hussein, broadcast on Friday, forecast that U.S. and British forces would soon be defeated by Iraqi resistance.

"Our belief is strong that God will grant us victory and we are confident that the moment for the foreign army to collapse is possible at any moment," said the tape aired by Al Jazeera satellite television. The voice sounded like Saddam's.

"It (defeat) is coming at any time

because of the painful blows of the strugglers against the occupiers and the rejection of the occupation by our dignified people."

The United States is offering \$25 million bounty for Saddam. It hopes finding him will help end a guerrilla campaign that has killed at least 52 U.S. troops, at an accelerating rate, since U.S. President George W. Bush declared major combat over on May 1. The U.S. military blames Saddam loyalists for the attacks.

"We call on you sons and brothers to be disciplined and orderly so we won't be taken by surprise," the supposed voice of the former Iraqi president added. The speaker gave two different dates for the tape; July 27, 2003 and July 28 under the Islamic calendar.

The speaker conceded that some "low and undignified" Iraqis had collaborated with the U.S. forces, and he urged Iraqis to fight and drive U.S. forces from Iraq.

"Some people lost their sense of balance during the war... and afterwards... The sense of balance will not be restored except through those who struggle in the name of the principles that will satisfy the nation, people and God."

"Only the actions of the faithful who struggled and fought can evict the invaders so that Iraq can return to normal," the voice said.

In a tape broadcast by another Arab television station on Tuesday,

Saddam apparently mourned the death of his two sons Uday and Qusay, killed by U.S. forces last month. He said they died as martyrs and vowed America would be defeated.

The CIA said it believed Tuesday's tape was almost certainly authentic.

In the new tape, the speaker called on Iraqis not to let fear of the occupiers overwhelm them.

"The feeling of guilt or fear of the future... causes some to commit trea-

son... instead of becoming a loaded weapon against the foreign occupying soldier."

He said Iraqis had "the priority and the right to the country's wealth which the occupiers are seeking to destroy, seize or channel to suit their mean objectives, including handing it out to their evil treacherous followers who have accompanied their tanks."

He urged those whose possessions had been looted in the aftermath of the war not to seek revenge.

Nine killed in mortar, gunfire in Liberia

MONROVIA, Aug 1 (Reuters) - Mortar and gunfire erupted in Liberia's capital Monrovia on Friday, killing at least nine people, as Nigerian peacekeepers said they would deploy to the war-battered country on Monday.

Terrified residents scurried for cover as fighting erupted around the strategic Old Bridge leading to the heart of Monrovia where two weeks of fighting have left hundreds of people dead.

A Reuters correspondent saw at least nine bodies, one of them decapitated, around a house that was hit by a mortar. Some of the dead appeared to have been felled by bullets.

"The shooting was very heavy and bullets started flying everywhere. The mortar landed and then blew up the place," an aid worker said.

A government frontline commander told Reuters by telephone that rebels attacked government positions in the morning. "But they didn't take the bridge, we pushed them back," he said. "There was shelling and some people died."

German police arrest man firing potato bazooka

BERLIN, August 1 (Reuters) - German police have arrested a man for firing potatoes at passers-by with a home-made bazooka, authorities in the western city of Essen said on Friday.

"It was like a bazooka that fired potatoes," a spokesman for police in Essen said. "Jolly dangerous from close range."

Police said the weapon consisted of about 1.5 metres (4 feet 9 inches) of drainpipe attached to an aerosol can which the man ignited to propel the root vegetables towards their targets.

"He was plastered and probably thought it was fun," the spokesman said.

The 33-year-old man is now under investigation for attempting to cause bodily harm and violating gun laws.

BAGHDAD - U.S. troops hunted Saddam Hussein armed with new pictures of how he might look in disguise, as a new audiotape purportedly made by the fugitive dictator urged Iraqis to drive out foreign troops.

"Only the actions of the faithful who struggled and fought can evict the invaders," said the taped message, which was aired on Al Jazeera television and dated July 28. "Our belief is strong that God will grant us victory."

JERUSALEM - U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell said Israel's security barrier in the West Bank could undermine a peace "road map", as Israeli troops fired rubber bullets at protesters trying to cut part of the fence.

Powell's comments, published in an interview with the Israeli newspaper Maariv, followed U.S. President George W. Bush's failure to persuade Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon to stop building the barrier.

ROME - Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi said he needed more power to govern Italy effectively, but vowed that he would win his bruising battle against graft-busting magistrates — whatever the cost.

LONDON - British Prime Minister Tony Blair will take the rare step of appearing before a judicial inquiry which begins investigating the suicide of Iraq weapons expert David Kelly later this month.

Blair, already suffering a collapse in public trust over his case for war in Iraq, will be grilled by inquiry head Lord Hutton about how Kelly came to be named as the source of a BBC report that Britain exaggerated the weapons threat from Iraq.

MANILA - Hundreds of police commandos moved to a base in Manila as Philippine security officials said they were checking reports of unauthorised troop movements after last weekend's uprising by renegade soldiers.

Police set up roadblocks on major roads leading into the capital of 12 million people and put helicopters in the air. The presidential palace and police nationwide were on high alert.

BAGRAM, Afghanistan - U.S. helicopter gunships killed four guerrillas in southern Afghanistan and coalition troops forced another group to flee into Pakistan after attacking a U.S. base, a U.S. spokesman said.

NKorea agrees to six-way nuclear talks - WHouse

WASHINGTON, Aug 1 (Reuters) - North Korea has agreed to multilateral talks on the crisis over its nuclear ambitions, White House spokesman Scott McClellan said on Friday.

"This would include six-party talks," he said. "In terms of the actual details and timing, that is still being worked out in consultation with our friends and allies in the region."

McClellan did not name the six parties but they were expected to be the United States, North Korea, South Korea, Japan, Russia and China.

"North Korea has agreed to the multilateral approach we have long sought," McClellan said, adding that Pyongyang had notified the United States of its decision through diplomatic channels.

The North Koreans have long sought bilateral talks but the United States has always insisted any discussions be multilateral.

"We continue to focus on the multilateral approach. Obviously they can always directly talk to us in the multilateral setting," he said.

"Obviously if you're sitting at a table, someone can talk across that table."

A North Korean foreign ministry spokesman said on Friday that North Korean officials met their U.S. counterparts in New York on Thursday and proposed six-way talks.

The crisis erupted in October when Washington said North Korea had admitted to secretly pursuing a nuclear weapons program.



Iraq's former first family of (clockwise from left) Saddam Hussein's son-in-law Saddam Kamel and daughter Rana, son Qusay and daughter-in-law Sahar, daughter Ragda and son-in-law Hussein Kamal, son Uday, daughter Hala, President Saddam Hussein and his first wife Sajda Kher Ala pose in an undated photo from the private archive of an official photographer for the regime. Jordan's King Abdullah has offered asylum to two daughters of toppled Iraqi President Saddam Hussein on humanitarian grounds, a palace official said July 31, 2003. Dubai-based Al Arabiya television said earlier that

Myanmar wants "cool down" before Suu Kyi release

BANGKOK, Aug 1 (Reuters) - Myanmar's military rulers are isolating democracy icon Aung San Suu Kyi to prevent political anarchy which could destroy the country, and will free her when the situation cools, Foreign Minister Win Aung said on Friday.

"We don't have any intention to prolong that arrangement. We are waiting for the cool down," he told reporters without giving any kind of timetable for her release.

"The only concern for us is not to let the country fall down into total collapse," Win Aung said on the sidelines of a regional foreign ministers' meeting in

Bangkok. "When the political situation is uprising and anarchy, we are preventing that," he added, speaking English.

Myanmar's military, which has ruled since a 1962 coup, has so far ignored Western sanctions and an unprecedented public rebuke from its Southeast Asian neighbours for holding Suu Kyi, 58.

She has been kept in a secret location — for her own protection, the government says — since a May 30 clash between her supporters and pro-government youths while she was touring central Myanmar.

"We don't have any kind of intention

of animosity against Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. That is why we have not taken any legal action against her and her party," Win Aung said.

Some Yangon-based diplomats and Myanmar exile groups say the military orchestrated the violence in which they say dozens of opposition supporters were killed.

The government denies this and says four people died. It blames Suu Kyi for fuelling chaos in the country.

Human rights group Amnesty International said on Wednesday that rights abuses in the former British colony had risen sharply since Suu Kyi's arrest.

Asian News

Najib: OIC, Asean should be involved in Manila-MIF talks

KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysia wants the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) and Asean countries to be involved in the peace talks between the Philippines and the Muslim separatist Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF).

Defence Minister Najib Tun Razak has proposed that these countries but added it was up to the Philippine government to decide.

"It depends on who the Philippines want to invite and who they feel is compatible," he told reporters after the launch of an exhibition themed Excellence of the Malaysian Armed Forces on the Millennium Era at the National Museum Thursday.

Najib said in earlier meetings with the

Philippines government, Malaysia had stated that it was ready to be more than just a monitoring team to oversee the ceasefire between the government forces and the MILF.

He was referring to Manila's request for a monitoring team last month when its peace talks with MILF resumed.

"We have stated our interest to be the main team to handle the monitoring team," he said, adding that they were waiting for the formal agreement between the two parties and the formation of a peacekeeping committee before sending the team in.

On Wednesday, Kuala Lumpur's ambassador

to Manila Mohamed Taufik said peace talks between the government forces and MILF were to resume in Malaysia on Monday.

He said Malaysia was prepared to host the talks aimed at ending the MILF's 25-year insurgency for the establishment of an independent Islamic state in Mindanao. Malaysia has been acting as a third-party intermediary in the peace talks, which were suspended earlier this year amid bombings and attacks blamed by the military on the MILF.

The Star/Asia News Network

MAS resumes flights to China

PUTRAJAYA: Police investigations so far have shown that the activities of the crippled Federal Special Forces of Malaysia (FSFM) have no links whatsoever with militant groups like the Kumpulan Jemaah Islamiah (JI) and the KMM.

At this stage, police investigations revealed the operations of the organisation were only linked to cheating and did not pose a threat to national security, said Deputy Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

Investigations are continuing to determine if the organisation had other hidden agendas, he told a press conference after presenting excellent service awards for the Home Ministry staff here, Thursday.

Abdullah, who is Home Minister, said activities of FSFM came to light in early June after police suspected something amiss and swung into action to cripple the organisation, which they did in less than two months.

FSFM, he said, was an offshoot of the Malaysian Emergency Action Squad, a legitimate organisation registered in 1998 supposedly to provide backup service to help the police.

Fire and Rescue Department and other rescue teams in search and rescue operations during disasters.

The FSFM, he said, started with only 20 members comprising those expelled from the squad.

Following a nationwide operation, codenamed Operasi Impian, 84 members of the movement were arrested and 2,637 of them surrendered. Police seized military uniform, authority cards, handcuffs and documents related to the activities of the organisation.

The Star/Asia News Network

Filipino journalist among "Ramon Magsaysay Award" winners

The Ramon Magsaysay Award Foundation has granted seven Asians - including Filipino senior journalist Sheila Coronel - the "Ramon Magsaysay Award", according to the Manila-based ABS-CBN online newspaper. Coronel was granted a prestigious award for journalism, literature and creative communication arts, for her part in efforts to develop investigative journalism as a part of democratic discourse in the Philippines.

Coronel is a founder and executive director of the Philippine Centre for Investigative Journalism. She studied political science at the University of the Philippines and intended to pursue legal studies, as her father did before, but she began writing for Philippine Panorama magazine.

Then in 1983, the assassination of Benigno Aquino Jr cracked the edifice of Marcos' power and the Philippine press stirred tentatively back to life. "It became compelling to be a journalist," Coronel said. She covered the movement to bring down Marcos among other outstanding investiga-

tive stories.

Other awardees included James Michael Lyngdoh, India's chief election commissioner, for government service; Dr. Gao Yaojie, a retired gynaecologist turned Aids activist from China, for public service; and Shantha Sinha, an Indian children's rights advocate, for community leadership.

Dr Tetsu Nakamura, from Japan, who is leading volunteer health-service programmes in Afghanistan and Pakistan, was honoured for promoting peace and international understanding.

Seiei Toyama, from Japan, a soil agriculturist and environmentalist working on greening the deserts of Inner Mongolia in China, was also recognised for promoting peace and international understanding. Aniceto Guterres Lopes, from East Timor, chairman of the Commission for Reception, Truth and Reconciliation, was honoured for emergent leadership.

The Nation

Suspected North Korean defectors questioned in Bangkok

By Supalak Ganjanakundee and Agencies Ten people, including two children, believed to be North Korean defectors, yesterday sneaked into the Japanese Embassy in Bangkok and are being interviewed to determine whether they are asking for an asylum.

The ten people, five men and five women, slipped into the embassy compound on Phetchaburi Road at about 10.35am when the embassy's gate was opened for a car to enter, said the mission's minister Toshihisa Takata. "Our security guard stopped them just inside the gate partly because they were shouting 'North Korea' or something like that.

The people then were escorted into the embassy's building," Takata said. "Now these 10 people are safely in the building of the Japanese embassy. We are now investigating their names... and their wishes," he told reporters, adding that they were trying to determine if they were seeking asylum.

As the embassy could not understand their language, it then asked for a Japanese diplomat from Seoul to interview the group. The diplomat was scheduled to arrive Bangkok last night. He added that the group, whose the youngest mem-

ber was just about three years old, were given food and water and they appeared in good health.

"Their condition at the moment is that we provided lunch and some water. It seems to me that their health condition is normal. They seem to be reasonably relaxed at the moment," he said.

The diplomat said he did not know whether the Japanese government would give the group asylum if they applied for it. It is reported that the ten people carried identity cards of UN High Commission for Refugees. The group last night stayed in the embassy compound and they were provided with berths, food and other humanitarian items.

A mini-van was seen entering the embassy and carrying berths and food. This seemed to be the first case in Thailand that North Koreans asked for an asylum in Japan because the North Koreans usually sought the chance at South Korean embassy. A source at the South Korean embassy in Bangkok said some 20 North Koreans, mostly students, had asked for and been accepted to go into asylum in South Korea. Police meanwhile strengthened security at the embassy.

The Nation

Malaysia's oldest woman enters M'sia Book of Records

TAIPING: The grand dame of Taiping, Lim Khoo Chai, has gone national by creating the record as Malaysia's oldest woman at 112.

"Hua he! Hua he! (happy in Hokkien)" said the friendly and bubbly centenarian on Thursday when asked about Malaysia Book of Records' (MBR) endorsement of her as the oldest woman in the country.

She said she had always wondered whether she was the oldest woman in the country as she had not met anyone who was older than her for the past few years.

"I have asked my family about this but they always teased me that I'm not. I will prove to them once I receive the certificate from the MBR," she said.

Lim's granddaughter Chin Suan Choo, 26, received the news from MBR over the telephone on Wednesday.

"We are very happy to hear that. We always have been asking among ourselves whether our grandmother is the oldest woman in Malaysia.

"Now we can confidently tell our friends and relatives that our grandmother is indeed the oldest person in the country," she said.

The MBR learned about Lim through a report in The Star on May 5. It subsequently contacted Lim for a copy of her identity card besides also checking with the National Registration Department.

Born in 1891 in Jalan Taming Sari, Taiping,

Lim has three children, 25 grandchildren, 46 great-grandchildren, and three great-great-grandchildren.

She married only when she was in her 40s and used to be the breadwinner of the family, working as a babysitter and a janitor.

Asked for her secret to longevity and staying healthy, Lim said: "Don't worry. Be happy."

Lim said it was a blessing for her to be surrounded by her family everyday.

"Being able to live this long will be meaningful only if I'm healthy and have family members to take care of me."

Lim's eldest daughter Low Kim Lan, 68, who has been caring for her, said her mother liked to have sambal in her daily meals and she could even finish two bowls of rice if she had the appetite.

"My mother can look after herself very well. She has a very good memory and likes to help out with the housework," she said, adding that her mother also insisted on washing her own clothes.

A spokesperson from MBR said they would endorse Lim's record soon.

"So far, Lim is the oldest woman we know of through the NRD," she added.

The oldest man according to MBR was Omar Abas, 144, from Terengganu. He died in September 2002. —

The Star/Asia News Network