

Clerics in Al-Zarqawi line of fire

'You have not spoken against US actions in Iraq'

Associated Press
Baghdad, November 24

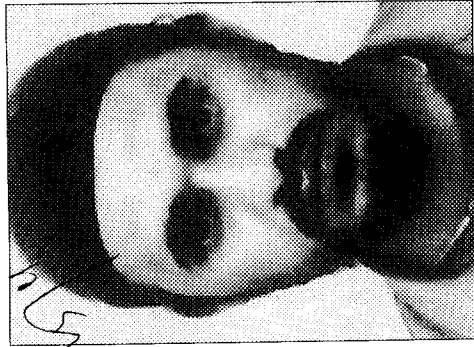
AN AUDIOTAPE purportedly made by Jordanian terrorist Abu Musab al-Zarqawi lashed out to day at Muslim scholars for not speaking out against US actions in Iraq and Afghanistan, saying they have "let us down in the darkest circumstances."

Al-Zarqawi, who leads al-Qaida in Iraq, is believed to have escaped from his headquarters in the insurgent-held stronghold of Fallujah during the massive US-led assault earlier this month.

Al-Zarqawi addressed his comments to the ulama — religious Muslim scholars — on the tape posted today on the Internet. Its authenticity could not be independently verified. "You have let us down in the darkest circumstances and handed us over to the enemy... You have quit supporting the mujahadeen," he said.

"Hundreds of thousands of the nation's sons are being slaughtered at the hands of the infidels because of your silence. You made peace with the tyranny and handed over the countries and the people to the Jews and Crusaders... when you resort to silence on their crimes, when you refused to hold the banners of Jihad and Tawhid, and when you prevented youth from heading to the battlefields in order to defend the religion," he said.

"Instead of implementing God's orders, you chose your safety and preferred your money and sons. You left the mujahadeen fac-



Abu Musab al-Zarqawi
Hard talk

ing the strongest power in the world," he said. "Are not your hearts shaken by the scenes of your brothers being surrounded and hurt by your enemy?"

It was unclear whether his message was intended as a direct threat against religious scholars.

This week, two Sunni clerics, who were part of an influential Sunni group that openly called for a boycott of January 30 national elections because of the US offensive against Fallujah, were assassinated by gunmen. Yesterday, Sheikh Ghalib Ali al-Zuhairi was killed as he left a mosque after dawn prayers in the town of Muqadiyah, north of Baghdad.

His assassination occurred a day after another prominent Sunni cleric was killed in the north-

ern city of Mosul — Sheikh Faidh Mohamed Amin al-Faidhi, who was the brother of the association's spokesman. It was unclear whether those two attacks were related.

The audio message appeared as US and Iraqi security forces continued their search for Al-Zarqawi after reports that he was in the region north of Baghdad. The US has placed a \$25 million bounty on his head. His group, formerly named Tawhid and Jihad, is believed responsible for dozens of deadly bombings and gruesome beheadings of foreign hostages.

In the northern city of Kirkuk, militants attacked Iraqi National Guard forces, killing one soldier and a civilian in the drive-by shooting, the military said today. The attackers struck after sun-down yesterday, firing from their car on Iraqi forces helping a civilian with his vehicle. Another Iraqi guardsman suffered injuries in the incident.

The release of the purported al-Zarqawi tape came a day after thousands US Marines, British troops and Iraqi forces began an offensive aimed at clearing a swath of insurgent hotbeds south of Baghdad. Yesterday's series of raids and house searches was the third large-scale military operation this month aimed at suppressing Iraq's Sunni Muslim insurgency ahead of crucial elections set for Jan. 30.

The assault aims to stem an increase of violence in an area that has been notorious for months as a danger zone.



Iraqi children joke with a Marine in Basra on Wednesday.
AP

Scared of love letters

Reuters
Fallujah, November 24

US MARINES thousands of miles from home in Iraq face ruthless insurgents, a debilitating desert climate and tasteless food. But they dread nothing more than opening the Dear John letter.

"It's so hard when your girlfriend sends you that letter and says goodbye. It just shatters all your childhood notions of romance," said Corporal Samuel Shoemaker, 22, of Washington.

"She wrote me a vague letter about our future but I had no doubt about what she meant. It's the last thing I needed out here. I first met her in grade school. I don't have the stamina to chase her anymore."

Thousands of US Marines launched an offensive this month that crushed militants. But many say victory can't ease heartbreak

by letter or email. "Man I can't believe it. I was engaged to a woman who I raised our child with for three years," said an infantry Marine.

"She wrote me a letter to ask whether we could put it on hold so she could have sex with another man. Then she asked me if I could accept her having sex with another woman if I reject the man." Strict rules of conduct have not stopped Marines from seeking love on base. But it is not always easy and dating Iraqi women is prohibited.

Some Marines do everything they can to avoid the Dear John letter, even if it means being lonely in a country gripped by suicide bombings and kidnappings.

Lance Corporal Joc Sims was not so lucky. His girlfriend ended it when he was still in boot camp. "It just stinks when you get the letter. She was my best friend," he said.

Handwritten mark: "Ami" with a circled "1" next to it.

সার্বভৌমত্ব ফেরত?

ইরাক নাকি 'আবার সার্বভৌম' কারণ মার্কিন যুক্তরাষ্ট্র তাহাকে সার্বভৌমত্ব দিয়াছে। সার্বভৌমত্ব কি ছেলের হাতের মোয়া? মার্কিন আগ্রাসন ও দখলদারির আগে ইরাক কি সার্বভৌম রাষ্ট্র ছিল না? কে সেই সার্বভৌমত্ব হরণ করিয়াছিল? মার্কিন যুক্তরাষ্ট্র এবং ব্রিটেনই তো! তবে আবার ঘটনা কি? ফিরাইয়া দেওয়া কেন? খুব একটা ঘটনা অবশ্য করা হয় নাই। বস্তুত, বিপরীতটাই বরং ঘটিয়াছে। কার্যত পূর্বনির্দিষ্ট দিনক্ষণের আগেই চুপিসাড়ে ইরাকি মন্ত্রিপরিষদের হাতে ক্ষমতা হস্তান্তর সারিয়াছেন মার্কিন কর্তৃপক্ষ। এই মন্ত্রীরা কেহই ইরাকি জনগণের নির্বাচিত প্রতিনিধি নহেন, সকলেই মার্কিন যুক্তরাষ্ট্র মনোনীত এবং প্রেসিডেন্ট, প্রধানমন্ত্রী, প্রতিরক্ষামন্ত্রী, স্বরাষ্ট্রমন্ত্রী, বিদেশমন্ত্রী সকলেই আমেরিকা কিংবা ব্রিটেনে প্রশিক্ষণপ্রাপ্ত, সাদ্দাম হুসেনের জমানায় বিতাড়িত কিংবা প্রাণভয়ে স্বেচ্ছানির্বাসিত। সুতরাং এই ইরাকি সরকারকে 'পুতুল সরকার' বলাই ভাল। অন্তত ইরাকিরা নিশ্চয় তাহাই বলিবেন। এমন একটি সরকার বা শাসক গোষ্ঠীর হাতে কার্যকর শাসনক্ষমতা কতটা ন্যস্ত থাকিবে, কতটাই বা দূরনিয়ন্ত্রণে মার্কিন প্রশাসন চালনা করিবে, তাহা লইয়া অনুমান বা কল্পনা করার অবকাশ কমই। সব কিছুই দিবালোকের মতো স্পষ্ট। জর্জ ডব্লিউ বুশ কিংবা টনি ব্লেরার ও তাঁহাদের প্রক্সহীন অনুগামীরা ছাড়া আর কেহই ইরাকের এই সরকারকে সার্বভৌম সরকার বলিতে রাজি হইবে না। ইরাকিদের অনেকের কাছেও সার্বভৌমত্বের এমন সংজ্ঞা নির্মম রসিকতা বা প্রহসন বলিয়া প্রতীত হইবে, সন্দেহ নাই।

কারণটি স্পষ্ট। সার্বভৌমত্ব হস্তান্তরের পর্বটি যে দুই দিন আগে সারিয়া ফেলিতে হইল, তাহার কারণ গেরিলাদের সন্ত্রাসবাদী হামলার ভয়। এই ভয়ের চোটে ইরাকে গত তেরো মাসের মার্কিন প্রশাসনের কর্ণধার পল ব্রেমার কোনও আড়ম্বর বা আনুষ্ঠানিকতা ছাড়াই একটি মালবাহী বিমানে বাগদাদ ছাড়িয়া স্বদেশে ফিরিয়াছেন। ক্ষমতা হস্তান্তর অনুষ্ঠানটিও কোনও দেখনদারি ছাড়াই নীরবে, প্রায় গোপনে সম্পন্ন করিতে হইয়াছে। যেখানে গেরিলা হামলার ভয় এতই বেশি, সেখানে সার্বভৌমত্ব কী তাৎপর্য বহন করে? গেরিলাদের অবশ্য ইঙ্গ-মার্কিন সেনানায়ক ও প্রশাসকরা 'সাদ্দাম-অনুগামী', 'বিদেশি সন্ত্রাসবাদী', 'জেহাদি জঙ্গি', 'ইরাকের অখণ্ডতা বিনাশকারী' ইত্যাদি অভিধায়

ভূষিত করিতে পছন্দ করেন। দেখাদেখি পুতুল সরকারের কর্ণধারগণও একই পরিভাষা ব্যবহার করিতেছেন। কিন্তু অগণিত ইরাকির কাছে এই গেরিলারা 'মুজাহিদ' বা 'স্বাধীনতা-সংগ্রামী' বলিয়া মান্য হইলে আশ্চর্যের কিছু নাই। আশঙ্কা, এই গেরিলারা অতঃপর ইরাকের নূতন সরকারের বিরুদ্ধে ধ্বংসকারী গৃহযুদ্ধে লিপ্ত হইবে। অন্য কেহ নয়, খোদ মার্কিন ও ব্রিটিশ দখলদাররাই এই শঙ্কা পোষণ করেন। আর সে জন্যই এক লক্ষ যাট হাজার ইঙ্গ-মার্কিন সৈন্য ইরাকে থাকিয়া যাইতেছে। যে দেশে এই পরিমাণ সশস্ত্র দখলদার বাহিনী মোতামেন থাকিয়া যায়, তাহাকে আর যাহাই হোক, সার্বভৌম রাষ্ট্র বলা যাইবে কোন যুক্তিতে? গেরিলাদের যঁাহারা বিদেশি অন্তর্ঘাতক বলিতেছেন, তাঁহারা নিজেরাই কিন্তু সর্বত্র বিদেশি, ইরাক তাঁহাদের ইতিহাসের কোনও পর্যায়েরই ডাকে নাই, তাঁহারা 'সাদ্দাম হুসেনের স্বৈরাচার' হইতে ইরাকিদের মুক্ত করিতে স্বতঃপ্রণোদিত হইয়া পরিত্রাতার বেশে বাগদাদে প্রবেশ করেন। এখন তাঁহাদের বিরুদ্ধে ইরাকিদের প্রত্যাখ্যান উত্তরোত্তর দ্ব্যর্থহীন হইয়া ওঠায় তাঁহাদের পলায়নের পথ খুঁজিতে হইতেছে।

পলায়ন ছাড়া ইহাকে আর কীই বা বলা যায়? ভিয়েতনাম, এবং কাম্বোডিয়া হইতে তিন দশক আগে মার্কিন আগ্রাসনকারীদের পলাইতে হইয়াছিল। আফগানিস্তান এবং ইরাক হইতেও যদি পলাইবার রাস্তা অন্বেষণ করিতে হয়, বিস্ময়ের কিছু নাই। আপন ভাগ্য নিয়ন্ত্রণের যে নৈতিক অধিকার প্রতিটি জাতি ও জাতিরাত্তের রহিয়াছে, কোনও অজুহাতেই তাহা কাড়িয়া লওয়া যায় না, স্বৈরাচারীদের গদিচ্যুত করিয়া 'অবাধ গণতন্ত্র' ও 'মুক্ত দুনিয়া' প্রবর্তনের অজুহাতেও না। গণধ্বংসের মজুত মারণাস্ত্র-ভাণ্ডার নষ্ট করার ভূয়া অজুহাতে তো নয়ই। রাষ্ট্রপুঞ্জ এবং নিরাপত্তা পরিষদকে পাশ কাটাইয়া কিংবা এই দুই আন্তর্জাতিক নজরদারি ও মধ্যস্থতাকারী সংস্থাকে অগ্রাহ্য করিয়া একতরফা ভাবে একমেরু বিশ্বের আধিপত্য কায়ম করার মাসুল আজ জর্জ বুশকে দিতে হইতেছে। উপরন্তু সমগ্র তৃতীয় বিশ্বে, ভূতপূর্ব উপনিবেশগুলিতে মার্কিন-বিরোধী মনোভাব আরও তীব্র হইয়াছে। আফগানিস্তান ও ইরাক হইতে যত শীঘ্র মার্কিন বাহিনী ও তাহার নেতৃত্বাধীন তথাকথিত 'বহুজাতিক বাহিনী' নিজ-নিজ দেশে ফিরিয়া আসে, ততই মঙ্গল। মঙ্গল ওই সব দখলদার দেশগুলির। মঙ্গল আক্রান্ত এশীয় স্বৈরতন্ত্রগুলিরও।

Iraq handover: a new dawn?

By James Meek

SOMETHING HAPPENED in Baghdad on Monday, but what exactly? What we know is that somewhere in Saddam Hussein's sprawling former cantonment on the banks of the Tigris, behind silver miles of new razor wire, behind high concrete barriers stronger than most medieval fortifications, behind sandbags, five security checks, U.S. armoured vehicles, U.S. armoured soldiers, special forces of various countries and private security guards, behind secrecy and a fear of killing so intense that none save a handful of people knew it had happened until after it was over, an American bureaucrat handed a piece of paper to an Iraqi judge, jumped on a helicopter, and left the country.

Paul Bremer's departure and the handover of a limited form of sovereignty to an unelected Iraqi government was to be the end of military occupation and the beginning of independence.

From London and Washington it may look that way and Iraqis, too, seem eager to believe that Monday was the beginning of the end of chaos and fear. But the Bremer who waved from the steps of his departing C-130 didn't only leave sovereignty, in the form of a terse two-paragraph letter, with the Iraqis. He left 160,000 foreign troops, a broken economy and a land beset by ruthless, reckless armed bands.

The handover was held in a single-storey former Saddam-era guesthouse in the zone, which has been given to the new Prime Minister, Ayad

Allawi. Fear of the bombers gave the occasion all the pomp of an office leaving do. It lasted only 20 minutes.

Mr. Allawi's residence and a similar building provided for the President, Sheikh Ghazi Ajil al-Yawar, look out on pleasant lawned gardens, studded with pools and orange trees.

It is a delightful setting from which to reinvent independent Iraq, except Mr. Allawi and Mr. Yawar are sandwiched by the enormous weight of

There was a curious ceremony in the Zone's convention centre which, apart from the odd Saddamish mural, could be a convention centre anywhere, intended to mark the handover of military authority from the coalition to the Iraqi military. A column of U.S. cavalrymen, dressed in the blue shirts, kerchiefs, gauntlets and black broad-brimmed hats of the Custer era, marched out across the industrial carpeting, bearing their de-

The creation of a transitional government seems a thin achievement, particularly when that government is showing authoritarian tendencies.

American enthusiasm, there to make sure they get the independence thing right.

On one side, the huge new U.S. embassy. On the other side, Saddam Hussein's lavish principal former palace or, as it is known since Monday, the annex to the U.S. Embassy.

Mr. Yawar had hoped to be waking up in that palace this morning but was told the Americans needed it too badly; in that sense, as in so many others, today will be just another day in the zone.

The first many people around the zone knew of Monday's events was an Iraqi flag billowing in the hairdryer-hot breeze from the Zone's tallest building. Inside the Zone, logos of the now defunct Coalition Provisional Authority, which Mr. Bremer headed, emblems that had started to look permanent, disappeared.

the restraining bar locks into place on an extreme funfair ride about to lurch into the air.

For despite the constraints the U.S. and Britain will keep on them, they have power and responsibility, and they know that in trying to invent a new narrative for Iraq, they are only doing what their Arab and Kurd predecessors did in learning the strange art of politics under the Ottomans and the British, likewise times of violence, revolt, occupation and compromise.

We will have to wait for Mr. Bremer's memoirs to know what he thought, looking down as his Chinook banked over the parched date groves, yellow cubescape and sluggish brown river of summer Baghdad for the last time.

Yet between the disastrous spell of looting which began the U.S. occupation, the disbanding of the army and police which enabled crime to flourish, the failure to rebuild the country, the continued presence of a vast U.S. force and the uncertainty surrounding future elections, the creation of a transitional government seems a thin achievement, particularly when that government is showing authoritarian tendencies.

But an Iraqi government, any Iraqi government, seems to many like the overdue fulfilment of what they wanted from the Americans all along, which was to painlessly extract Saddam and his family from their lives, like a bad tooth, and immediately vanish. Instead, the dentist moved in.

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Chirac slams Bush over Turkey in E.U.

By Ian Black and Michael White

BRUSSELS/ISTANBUL, JUNE 29. The French President, Jacques Chirac, bluntly told his U.S. counterpart, George W. Bush, to mind his own business yesterday when the latter urged European leaders to give Turkey a firm date for starting E.U. membership talks later this year.

Ignoring the determined effort to celebrate improved trans-Atlantic relations after the Iraq crisis, the French President publicly rebuked Mr. Bush at NATO's Istanbul summit for calling for special treatment for the Turks.

Mr. Bush, he complained, "not only went too far but went on to territory which is not his own". He added: "It's as if I was advising the U.S. on how they should manage their relations with Mexico."

As he was speaking, the British Prime Minister, Tony Blair, and Mr. Bush were asked about their current relationship with France and Germany, the key NATO critics of their Iraq war policy.

Mr. Blair said: "There's no point ... in saying all the previous disagreements have disappeared; they have not". But he insisted that U.N. resolution 1546 on Iraq and yesterday's

agreement on training Iraqi troops had given him what he wanted.

Mr. Blair has been notably more emollient in the running feud with Paris than Mr. Chirac whose domestic popularity is boosted by it: the exact opposite of Mr. Blair's situation at home.

Yesterday's target was an easy one for Paris. Washington, which long ago embraced secular Turkey as a bulwark against Soviet expansionism in the Cold War, has also promoted its case for integration in the E.U.

Since the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, that has become an even more urgent objective. The U.S., supported by

Britain, has been pushing hard on behalf of Turkey, and highlighting the value of Europe embracing the world's most successful Muslim democracy at a time when many predict a clash of civilisations between Islam and the West.

France has been the most openly resistant.

After denying Turkey even candidate status for E.U. membership for many years until it was finally conceded in 1999, E.U. leaders are due to decide at their next summit in December when it can begin formal negotiations, which will take at least 10 years.

First Turkey has to meet the

Union's strict criteria on human rights, the judiciary and democracy, and the recent authorisation of Kurdish-language radio broadcasts and judicial reforms put it on course for talks for an early decision to begin early next year. Polls repeatedly show France to be the country most opposed to the enlargement of the E.U., and specifically to Turkish membership.

With a population of 70 million and a high birthrate, it could be the Union's biggest member state when it joins, replacing Germany whose demographic projections point the other way. — © *Guardian*

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Iraq to get legal custody of Saddam today

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HC 13 396

Associated Press
Baghdad, June 29

SADDAM HUSSEIN will be transferred to Iraqi legal custody and face charges in an Iraqi court this week — but he won't go on trial for months and he will stay in a US-run jail because the country doesn't have a suitable prison, the Prime Minister said on Tuesday.

Prime Minister Iyad Allawi promised an open proceeding when Saddam faces war crimes charges, including genocide. Eleven other "high-value detainees" are also expected to face justice, he said at his first news conference since the US-led coalition handed over sovereignty to his government on Monday. "I know I speak for my fellow countrymen when I say I look forward to the day former regime leaders face justice", he said.

Saddam would be transferred to Iraqi legal custody on Wednesday and face arraignment before an Iraqi judge on Thursday, Allawi said. The dozen would have their arrest warrants read out. The detainees would remain guarded by US-led multinational forces until the Iraqi detention services were ready to take physical custody, Allawi said. Soon after the end of the Press conference, the Iraqi authorities

announced arrest warrants for Saddam and the 11 others, including former Deputy Prime Minister Tariq Aziz.

During the Press conference, Allawi was asked if his Cabinet had finalised plans for emergency rule as proposed publicly by several officials since the interim administration was announced on June 1. "We'll tell you about those procedures later — maybe tomorrow or the day after tomorrow", he said. "We'll tell you about those procedures that were adopted by the Cabinet".

Government officials have not spelt out what measures might be imposed. However, the Iraqi media have speculated that they might include special rules for searches, detentions and curfews in specific areas of the country where insurgent activity is strong. The trials for Saddam and the 11 others would not occur for months, he said and urged the Iraqi people to be patient. He acknowledged that more than 1 million Iraqis were missing as a result of events that occurred during the former regime — and that many Iraqis wanted justice done. But he insisted that Saddam must receive a "just trial, a fair trial".

A Saudi website, *Elaph.com*, quoted Iraqi sources as saying the list in-

ALL THE PRESIDENT'S MEN

- Tariq Aziz — Deputy Prime Minister
- Taha Yassin Ramadan — Vice-President
- Sultan Hashim Ahmad al-Tal — Defence Minister
- Abed Hamid Mahmoud — presidential secretary
- Ali Hasan al-Majid — Chemical Ali
- Watban Ibrahim Hassan al-Tikriti — Saddam Hussein's half-brother — intelligence minister
- Barzan Ibrahim Hassan al-Tikriti — half brother — director of the intelligence service
- Muhammad Hazmaq al-Zubaidi — Deputy PM and member of the Revolutionary Command Council (RCC)
- Aziz Salih al-Numan — Baath Party regional commander
- Sabir Abdul Aziz al-Douri — head of military intelligence
- Kamal Mustafa Abdallah Sultan Tikriti — Republican Guard secretary

cludes Ali Hassan al-Majid, also known as "Chemical Ali"; former Vice-President, Taha Yassin Ramadan; former deputy Prime Minister Tariq Aziz; and two of Saddam's half-brothers. "We'd like to show the world that the new Iraq government means business and wants to stabilise Iraq and put it on the road toward democracy and peace", Allawi said.

Allawi said Iraqi leaders requested that coalition forces retain custody of the deposed leader "until cor-

rection services are fully capable of providing for their safety and secure detention of the accused".

Saddam, captured by US troops on December 13, is being kept at an undisclosed location in or near Baghdad and has been interrogated by the CIA and FBI. The tribunal that will try Saddam has a budget of \$75 million. It will rely on a mix of Iraqi criminal law, international regulations, such as the Geneva Convention, and experiences of bodies, such as the Rwanda war crimes tri-

bunal. The US Justice Department has been gathering evidence for a war crimes case against Saddam, while other international groups have been sifting through mass graves where US officials say victims of Saddam's regime were buried. Saddam's military also used chemical weapons against troops and civilians during the Iran-Iraq War and during a Kurdish uprising.

Allawi said the Iraqi Cabinet was still discussing whether to reinstate the death penalty. Justice Minister Malik Dohan al-Hassan said Saddam could have a foreign lawyer — if an Iraqi lawyers' association agrees. Foreign lawyers, such as controversial French lawyer Jacques Verges who said he would be willing to defend Saddam, would need to be authorised first by the Iraqi Bar Association, according to Justice Minister Malik Dohan. He also said Saddam's lieutenants who remain at large, such as Izzat Ibrahim al-Duri could be "charged in absentia if evidence is established against them".

The Jordanian lawyer claiming to represent Saddam has argued that the ousted leader should be released because handing him over to Iraq's new government would violate international law.

Likely charges

Iran-Iraq war
After a series of border skirmishes following Iran's Islamic revolution, Iraq invaded Iran in 1980

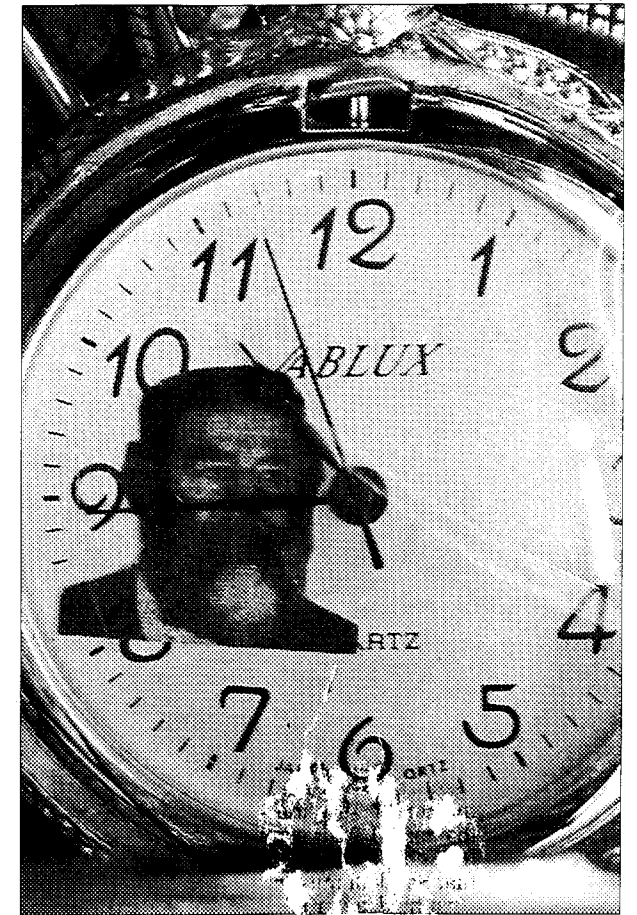
Use of nerve gas
About 20,000 Iranians were killed by Iraqi mustard gas or by nerve agents at the time

Attacks on Iraqi Kurds
In 1988, when Kurds were pushing for autonomy, Iraq forces used cyanide gas against the Kurdish town of Halabja, killing 5,000 civilians

Invasion of Kuwait
In August 1990, Saddam sent Iraqi troops into Kuwait which led to the Gulf War in January 1991. Hundreds of oil wells were set ablaze. Iraqi soldiers are alleged to have executed detainees. More than 700 oil wells were set alight

Killings & torture
Evidence has emerged of 270 mass graves across Iraq, believed to hold the remains of tens of thousands

SERVING TIME



REUTERS
A timepiece bearing the image of Saddam Hussein, produced after his capture, on sale in a Baghdad shop on Tuesday.

ইরাকিদের মনের ক্ষত সারানোই অন্তর্বর্তী সরকারের প্রথম কাজ

বাগদাদ, ২৮ জুন: ক্ষমতা হস্তান্তরের পরে জোটবাহিনী যে দখলদার নয় এবং তারাই যে সাদ্দামের অপশাসন থেকে ইরাকিদের মুক্তি দিয়েছে, তা বোঝানোই এখন অন্তর্বর্তী সরকারের সবচেয়ে বড় চ্যালেঞ্জ। এক সময় দেশের বাইরে থেকে বাথ পার্টির বিক্ষুব্ধদের সঙ্গে হাত মিলিয়ে সাদ্দামকে ক্ষমতা থেকে সরানোর

করাই হবে অন্তর্বর্তী সরকারের কাছে প্রধান লক্ষ্য। ক্ষমতা হস্তান্তর হয়ে যাওয়ার পরেও ইরাকে গেরিলা হামলার ঘটনা আজও অব্যাহত রয়েছে। ইরাকের আল-আনবার প্রদেশে গেরিলা হামলায় এক মেরিনের মৃত্যুর খবর পাওয়া গিয়েছে। গেরিলা আরাও এক জন মেরিনকে অপহরণ করেছে। গেরিলারা

নেতৃত্বে থাকা অন্তর্বর্তী সরকারের প্রধানমন্ত্রী আইয়াদ আলাউইয়ের পক্ষে এই চ্যালেঞ্জের মোকাবিলা করাটা মোটেই সহজ হবে না। সাদ্দামের শাসন থেকে মুক্তি পেলেও দীর্ঘ ১৪ মাস মার্কিন সেনাবাহিনীর হাতে চরম নিরাপত্তাহীনতা, গেরিলা হামলা এবং অপশাসনের মধ্যে থেকে বেশির ভাগ ইরাকিই এখন মার্কিন বাহিনীকে তাঁদের মুক্তিদাতা ভাবার চেয়ে দখলদার হিসাবেই ভাবতেই বেশি পছন্দ করে।

জেলে ইরাকি বন্দিদের উপর মার্কিন সেনাদের অমানুষিক অত্যাচারের খবর সংবাদমাধ্যমে বেরিয়ে যাওয়ার পরে ইরাকিদের মনে এই সন্দেহ আরও দৃঢ় হয়েছে। সাদ্দামের অপশাসন থেকে মুক্ত হওয়ার পরে

ইরাকিরা তাই এখন নতুন করে মার্কিন 'দখলদার'দের হাত থেকে মুক্তি পেতে চায়। সরকারি ভাবে ক্ষমতা হস্তান্তর হয়ে গেলেও নির্বাচিত সরকার তৈরি না-হওয়া পর্যন্ত মার্কিন নেতৃত্বে গঠিত জোটবাহিনীর সেনারা ইরাকে শান্তি স্থাপনের কাজে নিযুক্ত থাকবে। মার্কিন সেনাদের থেকে মুখ ফিরিয়ে নেওয়া ইরাকিদের সামনে তারা যে মার্কিন বাহিনীর হাতের পুতুল নয়, তা প্রমাণ করায় এখন ইরাকি অন্তর্বর্তী সরকারের সামনে চ্যালেঞ্জ। এই চ্যালেঞ্জের মোকাবিলায় ইরাকে গেরিলা হামলার মোকাবিলা করে শান্তি ফিরিয়ে আনাই নয়, ইরাকিদের মধ্যে আস্থা অর্জনে দেশে কর্মসংস্থান, সৃষ্ঠ নিরাপত্তা ব্যবস্থা এবং অর্থনৈতিক ব্যবস্থা সুদৃঢ়

এক নজরে

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- ১ মে, ২০০৩: ইরাক যুদ্ধের সমাপ্তি ঘোষণা করলেন মার্কিন প্রেসিডেন্ট জর্জ বুশ।
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হুমকি দিয়েছে, মার্কিন সেনাবাহিনী ইরাক ছেড়ে চলে না-গেলে ওই মেরিনকে তারা হত্যা করবে। অন্য দিকে, বসরায় গেরিলা হামলায় এক জন ব্রিটিশ সেনার মৃত্যু হয়েছে।

গেরিলা হামলা মোকাবিলায় আল-কায়দা মদতপুষ্ট সন্ত্রাসবাদীদের মূলপ্রোত থেকে সরিয়ে দেওয়াই যে আলাউইদের প্রধান লক্ষ্য তা প্রথম দিনেই বুঝিয়ে দিয়েছেন আলাউই। তিনি আজ জানিয়ে দিয়েছেন, যারা ইরাকে মার্কিন সেনা সরিয়ে দেওয়ার কথা বলে শুধুই নিরীহ ইরাকিদের হত্যা করছে তাদেরকে সাধারণ ইরাকি নাগরিকদের থেকে আলাদা করতে নতুন সরকার। এমনকী, এই কাজে সাফল্য পেতে সাদ্দাম জমানায় ক্ষমতায় থাকা সুন্নিদের

মন পেতে সেই সময়ের বেশ কয়েক জন প্রশাসককে ফিরিয়ে আনার কথা ইতিমধ্যেই ঘোষণা করেছেন আলাউই। তবে এর মধ্যে কেউ ঘৃণ্য অপরাধে জড়িত থাকলে তাদের কোনও মতেই ফিরিয়ে আনা হবে না বলেও জানিয়ে দিয়েছেন তিনি। তবে আলাউইদের কাছে খুশির খবর, ইরাকে নৈরাজ্য সৃষ্টিকারী লাদেন-ঘনিষ্ঠ জর্ডনের জঙ্গি নেতা জারকোয়াই ইতিমধ্যেই ইরাকি সাধারণ নাগরিকদের থেকে অনেকটাই বিচ্ছিন্ন হয়ে গিয়েছেন। এমনকী, মার্কিন সেনাবাহিনীর বিরুদ্ধে একদা বিদ্রোহকারী শিয়া নেতার মোকতাদা আল সদরও এখন এই ধরনের অন্তর্ঘাতমূলক কাজকর্মের বিরোধিতা করছেন।

Allawi plans amnesty for anti-US rebels

By Rashmee Z. Ahmed
TIMES NEWS NETWORK

London: Forty-eight hours before Iraq ostensibly passes out of Anglo-American control, its designated leader has dramatically indicated a free pardon for Iraqi resistance against the occupation.

Iyad Allawi, Iraq's interim prime minister, said his administration would make a clear distinction between those Iraqis who have acted against the occupation out of a sense of desperation and those foreign terrorist fundamentalists and criminals whose sole objective is to kill and maim innocent people and to see Iraq fail.

Allawi's proposed amnesty for Iraqi resistance-fighters would be a startling departure from current coalition practice in Iraq. It is thought to be a shrewd exploitation of growing Iraqi revulsion at the loss of Iraqi lives, including large numbers of Iraqi policemen.

Observers said Allawi's comments about a united national reconciliation effort were an important, possibly even decisive show of defiance. Significantly, they come just days before he is forced humiliatingly to play along with the notion that the June 30 handover means true sovereignty for Iraq.

Allawi's criticism of the US on Sunday for disbanding the Iraqi army is seen to be yet another attempt to portray himself as a spokesman for the Iraqi people and not a puppet on a Washington-London string. And he cuttingly rejected the notion that Iraq would have a replica of an imported model (of a democratic system) from the US, Britain, or indeed any other country.

But cynics said the comments, in an exclusive article written by Allawi for Britain's 'Independent' on Sunday, may be just as cosmetic as the June 30 hand over of power.

Turkey rejects ultras' demands; car bombs kill 23 in Iraq

Baghdad: Turkey on Sunday rejected the demands of militants in Iraq threatening to behead three Turkish hostages during US President George W Bush's visit to Istanbul for a NATO summit.

Militants loyal to suspected Al Qaida ally Abu Musab al-Zarqawi said in a statement to Al Jazeera television on Saturday that the three hostages would be executed within 72 hours unless Turks stopped working with US-led forces in Iraq.

"Turkey has been fighting terrorist activity for more than 20 years," Turkish defence minister Vecdi Gonul said in Istanbul. "They ask many things, they demand many things. We never consider them with seriousness."

Al Jazeera showed footage of the three hostages crouching in front of masked gunmen and holding up their passports. Turkey is not part of the US-led forces in Iraq, but many nationals work as drivers and support staff for the US forces.

Zarqawi's group beheaded a South Korean hostage last week after Seoul rejected a demand to withdraw its forces from Iraq. Last month, the group had beheaded a US captive. Both killings were filmed in footage posted on web sites used by



A five-year-old boy injured in a bomb explosion lies in a hospital in Hilla

AP militants. Zarqawi also has claimed responsibility for a series of bloody attacks, most recently a wave of suicide bombings and armed assaults in five cities on Thursday that killed more than 100 Iraqis and three US soldiers.

Terrorists have staged multiple attacks this month in a bid to disrupt the formal handover of sovereignty to an interim Iraqi government on Wednesday. US and Iraqi officials say they expect more attacks in coming days.

On Saturday evening two car bombs were detonated in a busy street in the town of Hilla, 100 km south of Baghdad. The US military said the latest casualty reports showed that 23 people were killed and 58 wounded. More than 20 car bombs have exploded across Iraq this month.

Meanwhile, Washington has offered \$10 million for Zarqawi's capture. "He remains the number one target inside this country. He is a very effective terrorist," brigadier-general Mark Kimmitt, deputy director of operations for the US military in Iraq, told a news conference in Baghdad on Saturday. US forces mounted three "precision strikes" in the rebellious Iraqi city of Falluja last week aimed at destroying Zarqawi's safe houses and killing his followers. Agencies

Allawi, a Shia neurologist active in Baathist politics before the party came to power, has long been seen as a key member of a US-backed clique of Iraqi opposition figures in exile. He spent years living in the UK and founded the Iraqi

National Accord party 13 years ago with the help of American and British intelligence agencies.

In the run-up to the June 30 transfer of sovereignty, Allawi has tamely agreed that Iraq needs foreign troops to stay on and police

the increasingly lawless country. But on Sunday, he emphasised the rapid rebuilding of Iraq's key institutions for law-enforcement, including five divisions of the new Iraqi army, police, border control and intelligence services.

Iran firm on N-plans despite pressure

REUTERS

TEHRAN, JUNE 27

IRAN will resist international pressure and hold to its decision on making centrifuges, which Washington says are key to an atomic bomb programme, Tehran's chief nuclear negotiator said on Sunday. The US, EU and IAEA condemned Iran on Saturday for deciding to produce parts for centrifuges that enrich uranium and urged Iran to rethink its decision.

"They may react bitterly or heighten pressure on us, but that is not important," the Secretary-General of Iran's Supreme National Security Council Hassan Rohani told Parliament, in

comments broadcast live on state radio. Iran sent a letter to the IAEA telling the agency that Tehran "intends to resume, under IAEA supervision, manufacturing of centrifuge components and the Assembly and testing of centrifuges as of 29 June." Iran insists its ambitions are entirely peaceful and has said it has no immediate plans to pump uranium hexafluoride gas into spinning centrifuges to start the enrichment process.



Rohani. Reuters

Twin car bombings kill 40 in Iraq

ANDREW MARSHALL
BAGHDAD, JUNE 27

TWIN car bomb blasts killed 40 people south of Baghdad in a fresh attempt to derail the transition to an Iraqi government in three days, the US Military said on Sunday.

It said 22 people were wounded in Saturday evening's blasts in Hilla, 100 km from Baghdad. Witnesses in Hilla said the car bombs exploded in a busy street in the largely Shiite town shortly after dark. The US Military said they were detonated near a mosque.

In a new videotape, militants led by suspected Al Qaeda operative Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi vowed to behead three Turkish hostages unless Turks stop working with US-led forces in Iraq.

Al Jazeera TV showed footage of three men crouching before masked gunmen and holding up their passports. It said it had received the footage and a statement from Zarqawi's Tawhid and Jihad group threatening to kill the



A US soldier keeps watch from a bunker at the main traffic control post in Falluja on Sunday. Reuters

men within 72 hours. The statement warned the hostages would be killed unless "Turkish forces and companies that support the occupation forces in Iraq" left by the deadline. Turkey is not part of the US-led force in Iraq but many nationals work as drivers and support staff for US forces.

The group's deadline is before the end of a NATO summit Monday and Tuesday in Istanbul to be attended by US President George W. Bush, who will discuss a NATO role in Iraq.

Underscoring the frail security situation, a loud explosion sounded across central Baghdad on Sunday and smoke could be seen rising from inside the Green Zone headquarters of the US-led administration, a favoured target for insurgents.

Washington has offered \$10 million for Zarqawi's capture. "He remains the number one target inside this country. He is a very effective terrorist," Brigadier General Mark Kimmitt, deputy director of operations for the US Military in Iraq, said on Saturday.

US forces have mounted three "precision strikes" in Fal-

CIA puts harsh interrogation tactics on hold

■ WASHINGTON: The CIA has suspended the use of extraordinary interrogation techniques approved by the White House pending a review by Justice Department and other administration lawyers, intelligence officials said. The "enhanced interrogation techniques," as the CIA calls them, include feigned drowning and refusal of pain medication for injuries.

The tactics have been used to elicit intelligence from Al Qaeda leaders such as Abu Zubeida and Khalid Sheikh Mohammed. Current and former CIA officers said the suspension reflects the CIA's fears of being accused of unsanctioned and illegal activities. "Everything's on hold," said a former senior CIA official aware of the agency's decision. "It has been stopped until we sort out if we are sure we're on legal ground." A CIA spokesman declined to comment. — *LAT-IMP*

luja over the past week aimed at destroying Zarqawi's safe houses and killing his followers.

Kimmitt said the latest strike, on Friday, may have come close to killing the Jordanian-born militant. Senior Military officials said 20 to 25 militants were killed in Friday's strike.

Iraqi guerrillas and tribal leaders in Falluja have denied Zarqawi is in the city, where hundreds of Iraqis were killed in April in fierce fighting between US marines and guerrillas. Critics say Falluja is now a safe haven for foreign militants.

Interim Prime Minister Iyad Allawi said violence could force a delay in national elections due to be held by the end of January, a key step in the transition to democracy.

"It's not absolute yet," Allawi said of the election date, according to excerpts of an interview with CBS News.

"We are committed to elections and one of the tasks is really to work toward achieving these objectives. However, security will be a main feature of whether we will be able to do it in January, February or March." — *Reuters*

After killing Korean, militants warn PM

Baghdad, June 23 (Reuters): Islamists vowed today to assassinate Iraq's interim Prime Minister, just hours after they said they had beheaded a South Korean hostage in the violent run-up to a US handover to Iraqi rule.

Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, a Jordanian accused by US officials of organising many deadly attacks in Iraq, made the threat against Prime Minister Iyad Allawi on an Islamist website.

"As for you, Allawi — sorry, the democratically elected Prime Minister — we have found for you a useful poison and a sure sword," said a taped voice, purported to be Zarqawi's own.

Allawi, a tough former Baathist who plotted against Saddam Hussein from exile, responded defiantly.

"We do not care about these threats, we will continue to rebuild Iraq and work for freedom, democracy, justice and peace. Iraqis have faced these threats before," said a spokesman from his office.

The interim government, selected by a UN envoy in consultation with American and Iraqi officials, will be sworn in when the US-led occupation formally ends in a week's time.

Zarqawi's group, Jama'at al-Tawhid and Jihad, said yesterday it had decapitated South Korean hostage Kim Sun-il after Seoul refused to withdraw forces from Iraq.

Hours after finding Kim's body, US forces launched an airstrike on a suspected safe house of Zarqawi's group in Falluja, west of Baghdad, the second such raid in four days. Residents said the attack destroyed a

Tough Allawi rejects threats



An Iraqi detainee embraces his son and daughter during an hour of family visits inside the Abu Ghraib prison on the outskirts of Baghdad. (AP)

garage and killed four people.

Al Jazeera television showed footage yesterday of hooded gunmen standing over a kneeling Kim, who was blindfolded and wearing an orange tunic similar to those worn by prisoners in US detention facilities such as Guantanamo Bay.

"We warned you and you ignored it," one of the men said. "Enough lies. Your army is not here for the sake of Iraqis but for the sake of cursed America."

Al Jazeera said the tape then

showed a man cutting off Kim's head with a knife. It did not broadcast that part.

South Korean President Roh Moo-hyun denounced Kim's killing and said his country would still send 3,000 more troops to Iraq to join its 670 engineers and medics there.

The Arabic-speaking South Korean translator, who shouted: "I don't want to die" in an earlier videotape, was kidnapped in Falluja. His firm initially said he

had been taken on June 17, but

the foreign ministry in Seoul said it might have been earlier.

Washington, which views Zarqawi as an ally of Osama bin Laden's al Qaeda network and a chief architect of violence in Iraq, has put a \$10 million bounty on his head. "The free world cannot be intimidated by the brutal action of these barbaric people," US President George W. Bush said.

Zarqawi and other insurgents have intensified a campaign of bombings, assassinations and attacks on oil targets to disrupt the June 30 handover to Allawi's government.

Korea firm on troops

South Korean President Roh Moo-hyun denounced the beheading and said today his country would still send more troops there rather than bow to terrorism.

In unusually brief televised remarks to a country angry and in shock at the gruesome nature of the killing, a sombre Roh said South Korea would deal resolutely with terrorism.

"I still feel heartbroken to remember that the deceased was desperately pleading for his life," Roh said. He described the killing as an inhumane criminal act and expressed deep sorrow to the family.

Kim's parents had urged their government to do everything to save their son, a devout Christian who had worked in Iraq for a year.

After news of his death, they sat cross-legged and stunned in their modest backstreet house in the South Korean city of Busan, as his sister wailed and thrashed around in grief.

Sisters working for US firm shot

Basra, June 23 (Reuters): Two Iraqi sisters working for a big US firm were killed in a drive-by shooting yesterday near their home in the southern city of Basra, relatives said.

Their father, Sadah Audishow, said he had been waiting at the window for his girls to return from work when he heard gunshots and saw a white pickup truck speeding past.

"I had been waiting for my daughters to come home at five o'clock," said Audishow, an Assyrian Christian who works and lives in the church with his family.

"I picked one of them up and she was dead. I went to pick up the other but found her dead too," he said today, his shirt still stained with blood from the night before.

Neighbours said men in the truck had opened fire on the girls' car.

Janet and Shatha, aged 38 and 25, worked for US company Bechtel, the father said. Bechtel has been awarded major infrastructure reconstruction contracts in Iraq.

The driver who had been taking the sisters to and from their jobs at Basra Airport, was



An aunt mourns the loss of Iraqi sisters Janet and Shatha Daniel at the family home in Basra. (Reuters)

wounded. Bechtel officials in Iraq were not immediately available for comment.

The family was taking the bodies of the girls to the northern city of Mosul for burial, the father said. "We had received no threats," he said. "We are peaceful people, just making a living."

Attacks on Iraqi translators and others working with US companies in Iraq are common.

There have been numerous reports of attacks on Christians and shopkeepers selling alcohol in largely Shia Basra since the US-led war last year.

Insurgents have intensified a campaign of assassinations, bombings and attacks on oil infrastructure ahead of the transition from US-led occupation to Iraqi rule on June 30. Most of the victims have been ordinary Iraqis.

Hostage killed as Seoul refuses to leave Iraq

Baghdad: An Iraqi militant group believed to be linked to Al-Qaida beheaded a South Korean hostage after the Seoul government refused to remove its soldiers from Iraq. South Korea confirmed the death on Wednesday and said it would evacuate all its "non-essential nationals" from Iraq as soon as possible.



Kim Sun-Il

The Arab satellite television channel Al-Jazeera broadcast a tape showing Kim Sun-Il, 33, kneeling before five masked and armed men, one of whom wore a large knife in his belt. Kim, wearing an orange prison jump suit and matching blindfold, heaved his shoulders, his mouth gaping open as if sobbing and gasping for air. "We warned you, but you refused," one of the kidnapers said, reading from a written statement. "This is what you brought upon yourselves. Enough lying and deceit. Your army is here not for the Iraqi people but for the damned America."

The video as broadcast by Al-Jazeera did not show Kim being executed, and the broadcaster did not say when Kim was killed. Brig Gen Mark Kimmitt, coalition deputy operations chief, said the body of an Asian male was found west of Baghdad on Tuesday.

"It appears that the body had been thrown from a vehicle," Kimmitt said in a statement. "The man had been beheaded, and the head was recovered with the body."

The South Korean embassy in Baghdad confirmed Kim's identity by checking a picture of the remains that it received by e-mail, the South Korean foreign ministry said. US president George Bush condemned the beheading as "barbaric" and said he remained confident that South Korea would go ahead with plans to send thousands of

troops to Iraq. "The free world cannot be intimidated by the brutal actions of these barbaric people," the President said.

The grisly killing was reminiscent of the decapitation of American businessman Nicholas Berg, who was beheaded last month on a videotape posted on an Al-Qaida-linked web site by the Monotheism and Jihad group, which claimed responsibility for Kim's death.

In Seoul, South Korean Foreign ministry spokesman Shin Bong-Kil said Kim's body was found by the American military between Baghdad and Fallujah, a Sunni Muslim militant stronghold west of the capital. Shin said, "It breaks our heart that we have to announce this unfortunate news."

Kim, 33, worked for a South Korean company supplying the US military in Iraq, according to the South Korean government. He was believed abducted several weeks ago. Agencies

Threat to kill Allawi

Cairo: An audio recording, purportedly made by Al Qaida-linked militant Abu Musab al-Zarqawi and found online on Wednesday, threatened to assassinate the head of Iraq's interim government that is set to take over at the end of the month.

"As for you (Iyad) Allawi ... the democratically elected prime minister, ... You didn't know that you have survived already traps we made for you but we promise you that we will continue with you the game until the end," the online recording said. "We will not get bored until we make you drink from the same glass which Izzadine Saleem tasted."

Saleem, a former governing council president also known as Abdel-Zahraa Othman, was killed on May 18 in a car bombing in Baghdad. AP

H.O. 13
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Iraq's struggle for sovereignty

By Karma Nabulsi

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OXFORD (BRITAIN), JUNE 23. The United States and Britain claim to be handing sovereignty to Iraq next week. In fact, the occupying power cannot legally transfer sovereignty on June 30 for one simple reason: it does not possess it. Sovereignty is vested in the Iraqi people, and always has been: before Saddam Hussein, after him, under the martial law of the American proconsul, Paul Bremer, today.

This fact is reflected in the language of the most recent U.N. resolution 1546, on June 8 as well as previous ones, all of which "reaffirm the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Iraq". The constant need of the U.S. President, George W. Bush, and the British Prime Minister, Tony Blair, to claim sovereignty reflects more than a misunderstanding of the laws of war and basic international law. It demonstrates an alarming ignorance of the democratic structures of the very countries they were elected to represent. This ignorance also provides us with some clues as to why they have no understanding either of what they are doing in Iraq, or what is happening on the ground there.

When the formal apparatus of a state crumbles during invasion and occupation, and authority is exercised by a foreign military power, sovereignty returns to its bearers, a country's citizens. Sovereignty is vested in the people, and not in the apparatus of state. This is the fundamental principle from which modern democracies draw their legitimacy, and the basis for all representative government. It is also the cornerstone of modern international law.

This doctrine of popular sovereignty has been set out in classical texts and in the modern era, most famously by philosophers such as John Locke, Jean Jacques Rousseau and John Stuart Mill. It can be seen in the constitutions and founding doc-

uments of the French and American revolutions, and of representative international institutions such as the U.N.

Yet, these are not abstract theories of state. They reflect a solid custom of political engagement that dates from the emergence of democratic systems in 18th century Europe. It is only because of this custom of resistance and the collective practices of popular sovereignty by generations of ordinary people that these principles are now embedded in every democratic legal system and governing institution. It is from this tradition of resistance to unrepresentative rule that Europe draws its own democratic culture, its notion and practice of citizenship, public space and political activism, and the role and responsibilities of the state.

It was the principle of popular sovereignty that was fought for by generations of Europeans from the late 18th century and throughout the 19th in order to establish democracies in the face of foreign military conquest and imperial rule. It was equally this principle that guided the actions and legitimacy of the underground resistance and the allies in the Second World War, and it is the very same principle that guides the resistance today in Palestine and Iraq. Democracy is a product of these struggles, and moreover, this historical practice is itself the essence of popular sovereignty in action, its very articulation.

The quest for representative government was at the heart of the battle against a variety of unrepresentative regimes in 19th century Europe: the Polish struggle for emancipation against the Russian and Prussian armies in the 18th and 19th centuries; the Russian partisans who fought Napoleon's army and later the Nazi invaders. All characterise a single political tradition, that of popular sovereignty. These customs of active engagement by citizens to free and rule themselves illustrate two important

historical lessons that tie us to the present relationship between an occupier and an occupied people. The first is that the struggle for liberty is universal, not imported, and emerged from concrete historical conflicts. The second is that today's democratic institutions are the product of these very struggles.

The most important lesson of our common history is that those organised political engagements against injustice are what created the political culture that ensured the stability of the democratic institutions that emerged. It is not only after one possesses democratic institutions that one practices democracy, nor is democracy merely a set of institutions or mechanisms such as elections. Democracy only holds if it emerges by customary practice in the public sphere.

So, the popular struggle for liberty has been, in the case of established democracies in Europe, the necessary route to gain those liberties, and to hold them. All the rights enjoyed today across Europe were hard won by political mobilisation, imprisonment and armed resistance, by organisational structures working underground for a common purpose at great risk over generations.

This common purpose did not emanate from above, from bureaucrats or technocrats, from the minds of political theorists or commentators, from the "transfer" of democratic ideas, liberal armies or even Rousseau. The young men who defended Jenin refugee camp in the West Bank and Rafah refugee camp in Gaza, and who recently won back the Iraqi cities of Fallujah and Najaf from the occupying power, are not the terrorists — or the enemies of democracy. They are our own past torchbearers, the founding citizens of popular sovereignty and democratic practice, the very tradition that freed Europe and that we honoured on D-day. — ©Guardian Newspapers Limited 2004

THE HINDU 24 JUN 2004

Iran releases British crew

in Area ① Iran SF 3

Associated Press

24/6

TEHERAN, June 23. — Iran today released the eight British sailors it had detained for illegally entering Iranian waters two days earlier. Teheran, however, said it was keeping the three boats confiscated from the Britons.

"The eight British sailors, including six soldiers and two ranking military officers have been released," a foreign ministry spokeswoman said. While they were no longer detained, she said, it might be an hour or so before the sailors are handed over to British authorities. She gave no further details.

State-run TV reported that the sailors would leave Iran without the three military patrol boats and unspecified equipment.

The men were detained on Monday in the Shatt al-Arab waterway that runs along the Iran-Iraq border as they were delivering a patrol boat for the new Iraqi Riverine Patrol Service. The waterway is known as the Arvand River in Iran.

A top military officer in Iran had said the sailors were being released because their intrusion into Iran's waters was apparently a mistake. Two of the sailors had been shown on Iranian TV apologizing and acknowledging they had made a mistake.

Iran had earlier said the men would be prosecuted. An Iranian spokesman said foreign minister Mr Kamal Kharrazi played a key role in resolving the minor border incident that had threatened to turn into a major diplomatic crisis.

British-Iranian relations have run hot and cold for years. The detentions follow a fresh strain after London helped draft a reso-



A TV grab taken from Al-Alam shows a British sailor marching blindfolded near the Shatt al-Arab waterway. — AFP

lution rebuking Iran for past nuclear cover-ups an IAEA meeting last week.

London dispatches diplomats

The British government today said it had sent a diplomatic team to an Iranian port city to await the release of eight Royal Navy crewmen, adds a report from London.

The foreign office in London said it had dispatched three diplomats from Teheran to Abadan, a port city 50 km east of the Iraqi city of Basra.

Earlier, Mr Tony Blair's official spokesman told journalists: "The Iranian authorities have now confirmed to us that they are going to release (the sailors) later today."

A foreign office spokesman also confirmed the news, but added that the eight Britons were still to be released. The spokesman said: "As far as we are aware, the Iranians have confirmed to us they will be released later today but we have got no confirmation that they have been released... We are discussing the details with the Iranians through our embassy in Teheran."

THE STATESMAN 24 JUN 1980

EU remains bitter but buries Iraq rift

Newmarket-on-Fergus (Ireland), June 26 (Reuters): President George W. Bush declared an end today to western rifts over Iraq but won little concrete in his appeal for European military help against insurgents.

"The bitter differences of the war are over," Bush told a news conference, which was delayed by anti-American protests staged around the lightning US-EU summit in Ireland.

Fenced off from his detractors by 2,000 soldiers and 4,000 police — a third of the Irish security forces — Bush holed up in a picturesque western Irish castle with European Union leaders ahead of a Nato summit in Turkey next week.

The Americans see a EU-Nato commitment to train Iraqi police as proof old enmities are over. Diplomats fear it may be simply the lowest common denominator the two sides can live with.

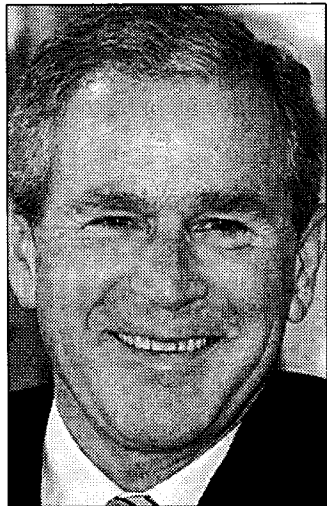
"Nato has the capability and I believe the responsibility to help the Iraqi people defeat the terrorist threat that's facing their country," Bush said. "The faster the Iraqis take over their own security needs, the faster the mission will end."

Protesters were kept well away from 16th-century Dromoland Castle as Bush met Irish Prime Minister Bertie Ahern, whose country holds the rotating presidency of the EU.

Ahern stressed the need for transatlantic unity four days before Washington cedes control of Baghdad to an interim government, a handover preceded by a surge of deadly attacks.

"It is vital that we move forward together in the coming days as the transfer of sovereignty approaches," he said.

Bush's message to Europe is that the international community must stand together on Iraq, where a car bomb killed one and



George W. Bush at Dromoland Castle, Ireland. (AFP)

wounded 40 today as insurgents kept up a bloody drive to derail Iraq's transition to an interim government.

In a reference to the US abuse of prisoners at Abu Ghraib prison, a joint US-EU statement stressed "the need for full respect of the Geneva Conventions", mirroring European disquiet voiced by Ahern over prisoner rights in Iraq.

Bush in T-shirt

Newmarket-on-Fergus (Ireland), June 26 (Reuters): George W. Bush was caught on video wearing a T-shirt at the window of an Irish castle before meeting European leaders but summit organisers urged broadcasters not to use the image.

A TV camera zoomed in on Bush looking out the window of his room at Dromoland Castle after his arrival yesterday evening.

The image of Bush was from the waist up.

Summit organisers appealed to news organisations covering the summit today not to use the video.

Nato leaders, including Bush, meet on Monday and Tuesday and are expected to formalise an agreement in principle to help train Iraqi security forces, far short of the original US goal of having Nato troops help with security. The joint EU-US statement stressed points of transatlantic unity in Iraq after a war that has split the West bitterly.

CONCEPT FOR EXHIBITION

TWO OFFICERS 'ADMIT' TO TRESPASSING

Iran softens stand on British crew

56-3 27/6
AFP & AP

TEHERAN, June 22. — Iran today hinted that an eight-man British Royal Navy unit arrested for straying into its territorial waters along the border with Iraq could soon be freed, but only after they were shown on state TV blindfolded and then making a public confession.

In a dramatic and humiliating twist to the incident, two officers admitted they had made a "big mistake", insisted it was an accident and apologised to the Islamic republic's Revolutionary Guards.

"My name is Thomas Hawkins from the British Royal Navy, number D04428," said the first officer, who appeared to be reading from a prepared text. "Our team of three boats and eight crew entered Iranian waters by mistake. We apologise because this was a big mistake," he said,

according to a translation of the Arabic voice-over provided by Al-Alam, Iran's official Arabic-language satellite news channel.

The second officer, clearly reading from a prepared text and also standing on the banks of the Shatt al-Arab waterway, introduced himself as "Chief Petty Officer Robert Webster of the Royal Navy, number D987567 Alpha." He said the team had "accidentally entered Iranian waters" when they were arrested yesterday. Prior to the confessions, state television had shown the men being held blindfolded in a cramped room.

But the signs were that their ordeal could soon be over. A member of the general staff of Iran's armed forces, Mr Ali Reza Afshar, said interrogators were trying to establish what the sailors and Royal Marines were doing on Iran's side of the strategic area that demarcates the southern border between Iran and Iraq and where the Tigris and Euphrates rivers flow into the Gulf. "If the results of the interrogation of the British soldiers show that they did not have bad intentions, they will be freed very soon," Mr Afshar told the student news agency ISNA.

Diplomatic flurry

In London, the British government today summoned the Iranian ambassador and demanded the release of the eight Royal Navy crewmen detained in Iran.

The foreign office said a senior British official in London had asked the ambassador, Mr Morteza Sarmadi, to explain why Iranian guards had arrested the sailors, while they conducted a "routine mission" in the Shatt-al-Arab waterway.

"The ambassador was asked to explain why the eight are being held, for their release as soon as possible and for full consular access to them meanwhile," the foreign office said in a statement. "He was asked for information on the reports that they will be prosecuted and told they were on a routine mission."

THE STATESMAN

23 JUN 2004

Iran seizes British navy boats

Agence France-Presse
Tehran, June 21

IRAN HAS seized three British naval patrol boats and detained eight soldiers after they allegedly entered its territorial waters on the Iraqi border, officials said Monday.

"This morning, three British boats with eight people on board entered Iranian territorial waters. The Iranian navy, in accordance with their duties, seized these boats and arrested the crew," spokesman Hamid Reza Asefi said in a statement.

"Currently they are being interrogated and an investigation is underway," he added. Official sources said the small patrol boats were armed with heavy machine-guns, and identified the detained Britons as "Royal Navy commandos".

A British military spokesman in Iraq said: "We can confirm three small Royal Navy patrol boats and eight crew have been out of communication since the early hours of this morning. Their last known indication was to be in the Shatt al-Arab area which is not unusual. There are no further details at present."

Iranian state television's Arabic-language channel, Al-Alam,



A file photograph shows Royal Navy members boat team in the port of Basra in the Shatt al-Arab, off Iran's coast.

said Iranian forces had also seized GPS devices, assault rifles, pistols, cameras and detailed maps of the Iran-Iraq border area.

The British soldiers were detained shortly before midday and had "confessed that they

had made a mistake", Al-Alam said, adding it would show television footage of the British detainees later the same day.

Playing it down as a "low-level incident", a Royal Navy spokesman at the defence ministry in

London said the three small boats appeared to have "strayed into Iranian territory".

"These boats are used for training Iraqi river patrol service ... what we would call river police," said the spokesman,

who was unable to specify if any Iraqis were on board.

"The waterway runs over a mile wide. The border runs pretty much down the middle of it ... Maybe, it was disputed whose side" of the border the vessels were on, he said.

British armed forces control a large area of southern Iraq around Basra, and along with Iraqi security forces patrol parts of the Shatt al-Arab, mostly to combat smugglers and anti-coalition militants seeking to infiltrate Iraq. Contacts with Iranian troops along that border area have generally been described by British sources as "cordial", and Monday's incident is the most serious in the sensitive area since last year's US-led invasion of Iraq.

The Shatt al-Arab border demarcation was a constant source of dispute — and of conflict during the 1980-1988 war between Iran and Iraq — under Saddam Hussein, until a deal was struck for the frontier to run at the midway point. Ties between Britain

and Iran have been strained in recent months, with the embassy here being targeted by a string of angry demonstrations sparked by an Iraqi prisoner abuse scandal as well as the entry of coalition troops into Iraqi holy Shia cities.

Zarqawi men threaten to kill Korean hostage

Reuters
Baghdad, June 21

MUSLIM MILITANTS in Iraq have threatened to behead a South Korean hostage by tonight unless his country scraps plans to send 3,000 more troops — a demand rejected by Seoul.

A videotape aired on Arabic al-Jazeera television on Sunday night showed 33-year-old Korean businessman Kim Sun-il pleading for his life. A banner in the background named his captors as Jama'at al-Tawhid and Jihad, the group led by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, a Jordanian accused of links to al-Qaida.

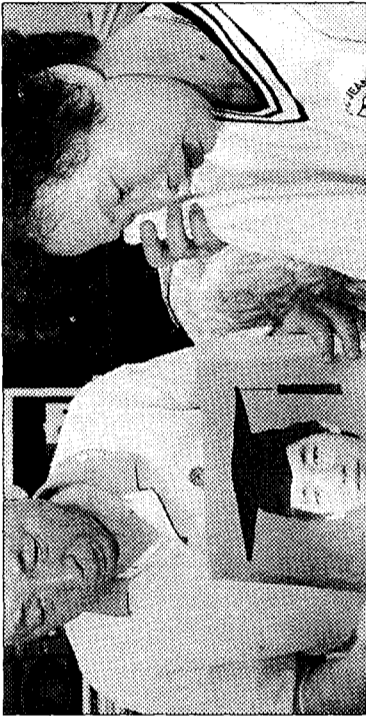
"Please get out of here," Kim begged, referring to South Korea.

an troops already in Iraq. "I don't want to die."

Kim, an Arabic speaker and evangelical Christian who has worked in Iraq for a year as a translator for a Korean firm supplying goods to the US military, was seized in Fallujah on June 17, the day before Seoul announced its troop plan.

"We ask you to withdraw your forces from our land and not to send any more troops, and if not we'll send you this Korean's head," one of a group of armed, masked men standing around the terrified South Korean said in the videotape.

The group said Seoul had 24 hours to comply. The threat to kill Kim came a day after a US air



AP
South Korean hostage Kim Sun-il's parents hold a photo of their son at their home in Pusan, south of Seoul, on Monday.

strike on Fallujah on what the US military said was a house used by Zarqawi's followers in the restive town west of Baghdad.

Local Iraqi officers said women and children but no foreign Muslim militants were among the 22 people killed in the attack. The raid shattered a lull in Fallujah and fuelled tensions before the formal end of Iraq's US-led occupation on June 30.

Insurgents, thought to include Saddam Hussein loyalists, Sunni nationalists and foreign militants, have sought to disrupt the handover to Iraq's new interim government with bombings, killings and attacks on the oil industry, its economic bedrock. Sabotage last week halted all oil exports, but officials said they resumed on Monday after repairs to one of two pipelines blown up in southern Iraq.

Allawi welcomes US strike on Falluja

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Falluja (Iraq): Iraq's Prime Minister on Sunday defended a US air strike that killed 22 people in Falluja, but Iraqi officers in the town said the dead included women and children rather than foreign Muslim militants. "We know that a house which had been used by terrorists had been hit. We welcome this hit on terrorists anywhere in Iraq," interim Prime Minister Iyad Allawi told a news conference.

He said the US military had informed the government before carrying out Saturday's air strike on what it said was a safe house used by militants led by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, a Jordanian described by the Americans as Al Qaida's leader in Iraq. However, Falluja's police chief and a senior officer in the Falluja Brigade, in-charge of security in the fiercely anti-US town, denied that foreign fighters had operated from the house. "We inspected the damage, we looked through the bodies of the women and children and elderly. This was a family," Brigadier Nouri Aboud of the Falluja Brigade said.

"There is no sign of foreigners having lived in the house. Zarqawi and his men have no presence in Falluja." The US military allowed the Falluja Brigade, led by former Iraqi army officers, to take over security in the town under a truce last month that ended battles between US Marines and insurgents in which hundreds of people were killed. The raid shattered a lull in Falluja and fuelled tensions before the formal end of Iraq's US-led occupation on June 30.

Brigadier General Mark Kimmitt said in Baghdad the house was being used by fighters loyal to Zarqawi, accused by Washington of leading a bloody campaign of suicide bombings and of decapitating a US hostage last month. The Iraqi government says foreign militants are involved in sabotage that last week brought vital oil exports to a halt. Iraqi

technicians repaired a sabotaged southern pipeline in the searing heat of the Faw peninsula. Oil officials said they hoped exports would resume by Sunday night.

Insurgents, believed to include loyalists of Saddam Hussein, Sunni nationalists and foreign militants, have sown havoc ahead of the June 30 handover to a new interim Iraqi government.

Meanwhile, the home of interior minister Faleh al-Naqib came under rocket fire in the town of Samarra, northwest of Baghdad, on Saturday night, the police said. Naqib was not there at the



Residents of Falluja walk through the wreckage of their homes which were destroyed in a US airstrike on Saturday

time, but four of his bodyguards were killed.

In Saddam's hometown of Tikrit, further north, unidentified gunmen killed a local council member, Izzeddin Ibrahim Abdullah, and a bodyguard on Saturday night, the police said. A bomb blast near the Central Bank in the middle of Baghdad killed a guard and wounded several bank employees on Sunday morning, a bank official said. A wave of kidnapping has accompanied attacks on US-led forces, foreign contractors and Iraqi officials. Most abducted foreigners have been released.

US military officers said there was no sign Zarqawi himself—who has a \$10 million price on his head—was in the house in Falluja when it was destroyed. Reuters

IRAQ / PREMIER APPEALS FOR GLOBAL HELP

Allawi restructures security forces

Mr. Allawi
grow
19-19
2/16

BAGHDAD, JUNE 20. Iraq's interim Prime Minister, Iyad Allawi, announced on Sunday a restructuring of the country's security forces, saying all Iraqi troops would be brought under a central command whose chief duty is to defeat rebel and terrorist bands plaguing the country.

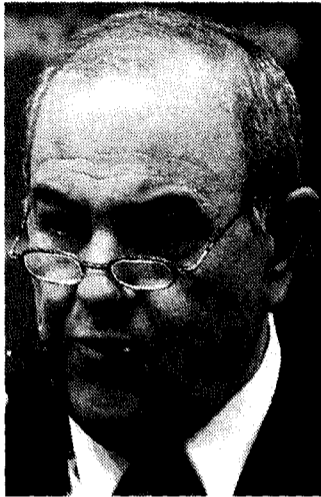
Mr. Allawi issued a plea for more international help in fighting Iraq's guerrilla war, asking foreign countries to send troops and donate military hardware to bolster Iraq's beleaguered forces. "Until our forces are fully capable we will continue to need support from our friends," Mr. Allawi told reporters.

The Prime Minister announced creation of a ministerial-level committee for national security including among others the Ministers of Defence, Interior, Foreign Affairs, Justice, and Finance. He said he discussed the revamping with U.S. Deputy Defence Secretary Paul Wolfowitz, who is visiting Iraq this week.

Mr. Allawi also announced the establishment of a Joint Operations Centre, and regional and local security offices that will coordinate Iraqi military actions with the U.S.-led coalition. U.S. Army Lt. Gen. Thomas F. Metz, commander of Multinational Corps Iraq, will retain overall control of Iraq's security, even after Iraqis regain sovereignty on June 30.

The incoming Government is also considering an amnesty for Iraqi guerrillas who have not had direct roles in killing U.S.-led occupation forces or Iraqis, the Interior Minister, Falah Hassan al-Naqib, told reporters after the briefing.

Mr. Allawi said his Ministers



The Iraqi interim Prime Minister, Iyad Allawi, at a press conference in Baghdad on Sunday. — AFP

were also discussing the imposition of emergency law in parts of Iraq, to help police and paramilitaries bring order. "We

might impose some kind of martial law in some places if necessary in accordance with the law and in respect to the human rights and the international law," he said.

Mr. Allawi also acknowledged that the May 2003 decision by the U.S. occupation chief, Paul Bremer, to disband the Iraqi army was a mistake.

The Iraqi army almost disintegrated during the U.S.-led invasion in 2003, its barracks and weapons stores looted and tanks, planes and other hardware destroyed. Now, Mr. Allawi intends to resurrect aspects of Iraq's former military, enlarging the overall army while creating police and paramilitary units focused on fighting terrorists and insurgents and controlling riots.

The U.S.-created paramilitary Iraqi Civil Defence Corps would be redesigned as a National Guard force and placed under army control, along with border guards. — AP

Chechen rebels in Iraq

By Vladimir Radyuhin

MOSCOW, JUNE 20. About 300 Chechen fighters arrived in Iraq to fight the U.S.-led coalition forces, news reports said.

Russian news services quoted a source in the Italian intelligence services in Iraq as saying that the Chechens last night secretly infiltrated into Iraq. He said the 2,900-strong Italian battalion in Nassiriya may be one of the main targets for the Chechen rebels. The Chechens were already in touch with local insurgents in the region, the Italian source said.

The Italian Army General Staff head, General Giulio Fraticelli, confirmed the report. The general, who is in Nassiriya, was quoted by the Itar-Tass news agency as saying that the deployment of Chechen rebels could be an attempt to lend greater punch to guerilla attacks in the zone of Italian responsibility.

According to Italian intelligence sources, the Chechen rebels were linked to Osama bin Laden's Al Qaeda.

THE HINDU

21 JUN 2003

Falluja blast kills 22 Iraqis, witnesses blame US jets

FADEL BADRAN
FALLUJA | JUNE 19

A US air strike killed 22 Iraqis in Falluja on Saturday, witnesses said, in a raid likely to inflame anti-American anger ahead of a planned handover to Iraqi rule on June 30. The US Military had no immediate word on the explosion. "An American plane hit this house and three others were damaged. Only body parts are left," a witness said, as rescuers dug through the rubble of a flattened house for survivors.

"They brought us 22 corpses, children, women and youth," Ahmed Hassan, a cemetery worker. A man sat on the floor weeping as someone asked him how

many members of his family were killed. "I don't know. Maybe 10," he said.

In southern Iraq, guerrillas bent on disrupting the handover killed a Portuguese security man as technicians strove to repair a sabotaged pipeline and restore vital oil exports. Police said a bomb exploded on a road near Basra, as a vehicle. An Iraqi policeman was also killed and an Indian and another Iraqi were wounded.

The US Military reported the deaths of two more US soldiers, bringing to 614 the total killed in action since last year's invasion of Iraq to topple Saddam Hussein.

Interim Prime Minister Iyad Allawi will reach out to officials who served in Sad-

dam's Baath party, a senior official in the US-led authority said.

"You will see considerable efforts by the PM to show that they do have a place in the political process," said the official.

He said efforts to enable Iraqi security forces to operate under a clear Iraqi chain of command had accelerated after a crisis in April when some units refused to join the US assault on Falluja or colluded with a Shi'ite uprising in the South.

"It goes with handing over sovereignty. We have always understood that the transfer of sovereignty would have to be complete. You can't do it in dribs and drabs," he said. —Reuters

INDIAN EXPRESS 20 JUN 2003

Nuke watchdog rebukes Iran

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Associated Press

VIENNA, June 18. — Iran avoided sanctions in a sharply worded resolution approved today by the UN nuclear watchdog agency but was censured for past cover-ups and was warned to be more forthcoming if it wants an end to an investigation into suspected activities.

In harsh language, the resolution approved by the 35-member board of governors of the International Atomic Energy Agency "deplores" that "Iran's cooperation has not been as full, timely and proactive as it should have been", and notes "with concern that after almost two years" since Iran's undeclared programme came to light, "a number of ques-

tions remain outstanding'

The resolution submitted by three European powers — France, Germany and Britain — was a product of days of diplomatic manoeuvring over the right wording.

As the agency put final touches on the wording yesterday, diplomats speaking on condition of anonymity said the IAEA was looking into accusations that Iran was razing parts of a restricted area next to a military complex in a Tehran suburb.

Satellite photos showed that several buildings had been destroyed and top soil had been removed at Lavizan Shiyan.

Iran's chief delegate to the Vienna meeting Mr Hossein Mousavian, denied a cover-up and said the UN's nuclear watchdog was free to inspect the site.

THE STATESMAN

The urge to modernise West Asia

By Hamid Ansari

THE RELATIONSHIP between the Occident and the Orient, wrote Edward Said, "is a relationship of power, of domination, [and] of varying degrees of a complex hegemony." Over a period of time it created images and stereotypes. Even in the United States, Mark Twain and Theodore Roosevelt were not immune to it, nor was Commodore Robert Shufeldt of the USS Ticonderoga who sailed up the Shatt al-Arab to Basra in 1879 and noted that "there is no place in the world where the physical manifestation of power is so necessary for the diffusion of the knowledge of the moral power of a civilised nation as amongst the barbarous people that dwell upon these shores."

This particular juxtaposition of physical and moral power has a contemporary relevance in the context of the debate about Middle East reforms that was initiated in February when a draft U.S. proposal for the G-8 Summit was leaked to a London daily. A furor in the Arab world was its immediate outcome: an Arab summit got deferred; when reconvened, it broke up without a consensus. It has now been repackaged as the Broader Middle East and North Africa Initiative and took final shape in the G-8 Statement of June 9.

This bears no resemblance to the February document and is a measure of the distance the originator of the idea, the U.S. President, George W. Bush personally, has travelled in reverse. It comes in the same week as the Security Council resolution on Iraq. The two together revalidate Edward Gibbon's dictum that "omnipotence itself cannot escape the murmurs of its discordant votaries."

The original Greater Middle East proposal defined the target area as "the Arab world, plus Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran, Turkey, and Israel." It took as its point of reference the UNDP's Arab Human Development Reports (AHDRs) for 2002 and 2003 and their identification of three def-

icits that plague the region — freedom, knowledge and women's empowerment. It concluded that these posed a direct threat to the stability of the region and contributed to "conditions that threaten the national interests of all G-8 members." The way out, it suggested, was to launch a coordinated effort to promote political, economic, and social reforms.

These were spelt out in some detail. Two aspects of it were noteworthy; both related to questions of identity, both were arbitrary: the first to the definition of the region and the second to what constitutes the na-

community." He also addressed the impasse in the Israeli-Palestinian relations and suggested a three-pronged approach: an expansion of the "Quartet" by the inclusion of Egypt and Saudi Arabia; the acceptance of the Sharon plan for unilateral withdrawal from Gaza since it would "provide a useful 'detour' in the road map without abandoning it"; and an acceptance of the Trusteeship idea for the Palestinian territories, with the Arab countries being given the responsibility of administering it.

Around the same time, Senators Lieberman and Hagel enlarged the

Is the U.S. prepared for the consequences of electoral politics in the region, including the possibility of Islamist parties coming to power?

tional interests of the G-8 states. Yet another feature of the proposal was that while it covered non-Arab states also, the two AHDRs, on which it claims to base its argument, do not refer to them and give no supportive data. Lastly, the inclusion of Israel in this group is mystifying since Israeli society does not suffer from the three deficits. The data included in the AHDRs has in any case been available for at least a decade in the annual Human Development Reports that give the global picture on different aspects of human security. Nor is the corrective recipe a novel one since education, role of women, and quality of political leadership were identified by Paul Kennedy in 1993 as the three determinants of success in the 21st century.

Where then was the novelty, and the rationale, of the GME? One aspect of the thinking behind the proposal was revealed when Senator Richard Lugar spoke about it in April and suggested that a NATO initiative for a "Cooperation for Peace" programme with these countries in order "to integrate them into the international

tion of the Arab-Israeli dispute on the basis of Security Council Resolutions 242, 338 and 425 and the Quartet statement of May 4, 2004. The statement stresses that "change should not and cannot be imposed from outside," that "each country is unique and their diversity should be respected," and that "each society will reach the pace and scope of change."

The G-8 statement is more in step with the various European Union reform initiatives that have been pursued in recent years and have not caused offence. Its reiteration of the need to solve the Palestinian problem suggests forward movement on the part of the U.S. It remains to be seen how the Israeli factor in American domestic politics will respond to it.

Some questions remain to be answered: Is the retardation of the region due to cultural or historical reasons? Is the U.S. prepared for the consequences of electoral politics in the region, including the possibility of Islamist parties coming to power? What is the rationale of the enormous expenditure incurred by these countries on military hardware so assiduously sold to them by the developed world? Is it not the case that the "marriage between imperialism and patriarchy" (to use Hisham Sharabi's phrase) produced retarded authoritarian structures that were relished in the West for eight decades as dependable friends? Today they are asked to bend to the breaking point to forcibly impose modernisation. It leaves the rulers bewildered and their public sceptical and suspicious. Most of the Arab leaders invited to the G-8 discussion on the subject refused to participate. They would see the climbdown as a vindication of their forms that, by wide ranging consensus, must get under way since the status quo cannot long endure?

(The writer is a Distinguished Fellow at the Observer Research Foundation, New Delhi.)

35 killed in Iraq car bomb attack

138 Hurt As Rebels Step Up Drive Against US Plans

Baghdad: A suicide car bomber killed 35 people at an Iraqi military base in Baghdad on Thursday as guerrillas intensified a bloody campaign to sabotage plans for US-led occupation to give way to Iraqi rule on June 30.

The blast outside an army recruiting centre on a busy road also wounded 138 people. Colonel Mike Murray of the US 1st Cavalry Division said the bomber had blown up a white four-wheel-drive vehicle at the centre near Muthanna airport, where US troops are based.

Murray said about 175 army recruits inside the Iraqi base were unhurt. Passersby took the brunt of the blast. It was the latest attack in a lethal drive by guerrillas determined to undermine Iraq's new interim government ahead of the transfer of power from the US-led occupation.

"This was a cowardly attack. It is a demonstration again that these attacks are aimed at the stability of Iraq and the Iraqi people," Prime Minister Iyad Allawi said at the scene. The insurgents, thought to include Baathists loyal to Saddam Hussein, Iraqi nationalists and foreign militants, have targeted Iraq's

oil industry, government officials and security forces in the run-up to the handover.

Oil exports, Iraq's economic lifeblood, remained paralysed on Thursday, and engineers said oil wells were being shut down while pipelines blown up in the south and north were repaired. Reuters

Counter-terror meet begins

Sydney: Special forces and counter-terrorism officials from the US, Asia, including India, and Pacific nations began a meeting here on Wednesday in an unprecedented attempt to coordinate their war against the Al Qaida and its South-East Asian allies.

The 3-day gathering, held under tight security in the rural town of Bowral, was kept secret until hours before Australian defence minister Robert Hill addressed the delegates. "As unpalatable as it may be, we have to acknowledge that this region is a breeding ground for Islamic extremism," Hill said. AFP

18 JUN 2003

Atomic Energy Agency in resolving outstanding issues related to its program."

Much of the debate in Vienna has centered on whether the agency should impose a deadline for Iran to cooperate - something the United States has sought. Dr. ElBaradei has not called for a deadline, though his statement to the agency's board suggested he was running short of patience.

Related |

Nor is it considered likely that the resolution, which is being drafted by Britain, France and Germany, will set a deadline, a diplomat involved in the deliberations said.

Iran says it has cooperated with the agency and is trying to soften the resolution.

It insists its activities are geared toward producing commercial nuclear energy. But feelings toward Tehran have soured in the wake of fresh disclosures, according to diplomats.

The agency said in a recent report that Iran was continuing to produce parts for centrifuges, which can be used to enrich uranium to a grade suitable for weapons. It is also preparing to make uranium hexafluoride, the material that is fed into centrifuges to produce enriched uranium.

Dr. ElBaradei said it was "premature to make a judgment" about whether Iran's program was military. But the agency has been in an increasingly tense standoff with the Iranians in the two years since it began investigating a program that Iran covered up for nearly two decades.

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Agency Presses Iran to Disclose Nuclear Activities

By MARK LANDLER

Published: June 15, 2004

RANKFURT, June 14 - Frustrated with Iran's "changing and at times contradictory" stories about its nuclear program, the head of the International Atomic Energy Agency demanded Monday that Tehran provide a full accounting "within the next few months."

The remarks by the director, Mohamed ElBaradei, were uncharacteristically blunt, according to diplomats meeting in Vienna this week to review Iran's compliance with the United Nations watchdog agency.

Iran is likely to be sharply criticized in a resolution that the United States and other members of the agency's board are scheduled to vote on later this week.

The White House said it shared Dr. ElBaradei's "serious concerns," and urged Iran to "come clean and abide by its international agreements."

The American ambassador to the agency, Kenneth C. Brill, said Dr. ElBaradei's statement "showed how clear the contrast is between what the Iranians say and what the I.A.E.A. finds the reality is."

The Bush administration welcomed the director general's statement, and officials expressed hope that it would add to pressure from Europe and Russia - as well as the United States - to force Iran to disclose its nuclear activities. They said they would leave open the possibility of seeking action at the United Nations Security Council if current efforts failed.

"Our view is that the I.A.E.A. has documented already 18 years of clandestine nuclear activities in Iran," said Richard A. Boucher, the State Department spokesman. "Tehran has repeatedly failed to declare significant troubling aspects of its nuclear program. It's interfered with and suspended inspections, and it's failed to cooperate with the International

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Saddam handover in two weeks

Reuters

Dubai, June 15

FORMER IRAQI dictator Saddam Hussein will be handed over to the country's new government for trial within two weeks, Prime Minister Iyad Allawi says.

"Saddam and the others will be handed over to the Iraqis, to the government," he said in comments to Arab satellite channel al-Jazeera on Monday. The trials would start "as soon as possible".

"All the current detainees, without exception, will be handed over to the Iraqi authority. The handover will take place within the next two weeks," he said.

US troops captured Saddam in December near his



Saddam Hussein after his capture.

hometown of Tikrit and he has been in US hands ever since, held as a prisoner of war at an unknown location. The US has agreed to give him — and other indicted officials in its custody — to the Iraqis for trial once a sovereign government sets up a special tribunal capa-

ble of conducting a fair trial after June 30.

The tribunal plans to charge some of Saddam's associates by the end of this year; the top court administrator Salem Chalabi said last week. It hopes former Saddam aides captured by US occupation troops will testify against him during their prosecution, which could take many months.

Officials say the aides would be tried before Saddam appears in the dock in a Baghdad complex that once stored gifts for him. The aides' trials could help the tribunal prove a chain of command linking Saddam to crimes against humanity.

The status of the ousted ruler has been the subject of

discussion as the formal end of the occupation approaches. The spokeswoman of the International Committee of the Red Cross said coalition authorities must file criminal charges against Saddam or let him go when sovereignty is transferred to the Iraqi government.

The new interim government is trying to assert itself even as Iraqi and US forces struggle to maintain order in Iraq. On Tuesday, dozens of angry Shias gathered in Baghdad's Firdous Square for the funeral of six Iraqi Shia truck drivers. Mourners said the men were butchered by Sunni extremists in Fallujah after police handed them over to insurgents.

16/6/03

16/6/03

Another car bomb rocks Baghdad

W. R. ... 15/6

16 DIE, 60 INJURED

Agence France-Presse
Baghdad/Istanbul, June 14

A POWERFUL car bomb killed at least 16 people, including five foreign contractors, and wounded more than 60 when it ripped through a busy Baghdad street Monday in an attack that is believed to have targeted a US military convoy.

Amid the rumbling violence, British Defence Secretary Geoffrey Hoon began a surprise 24-hour trip to the southern city of Basra, where most of Britain's 8,530 troops in Iraq are deployed.

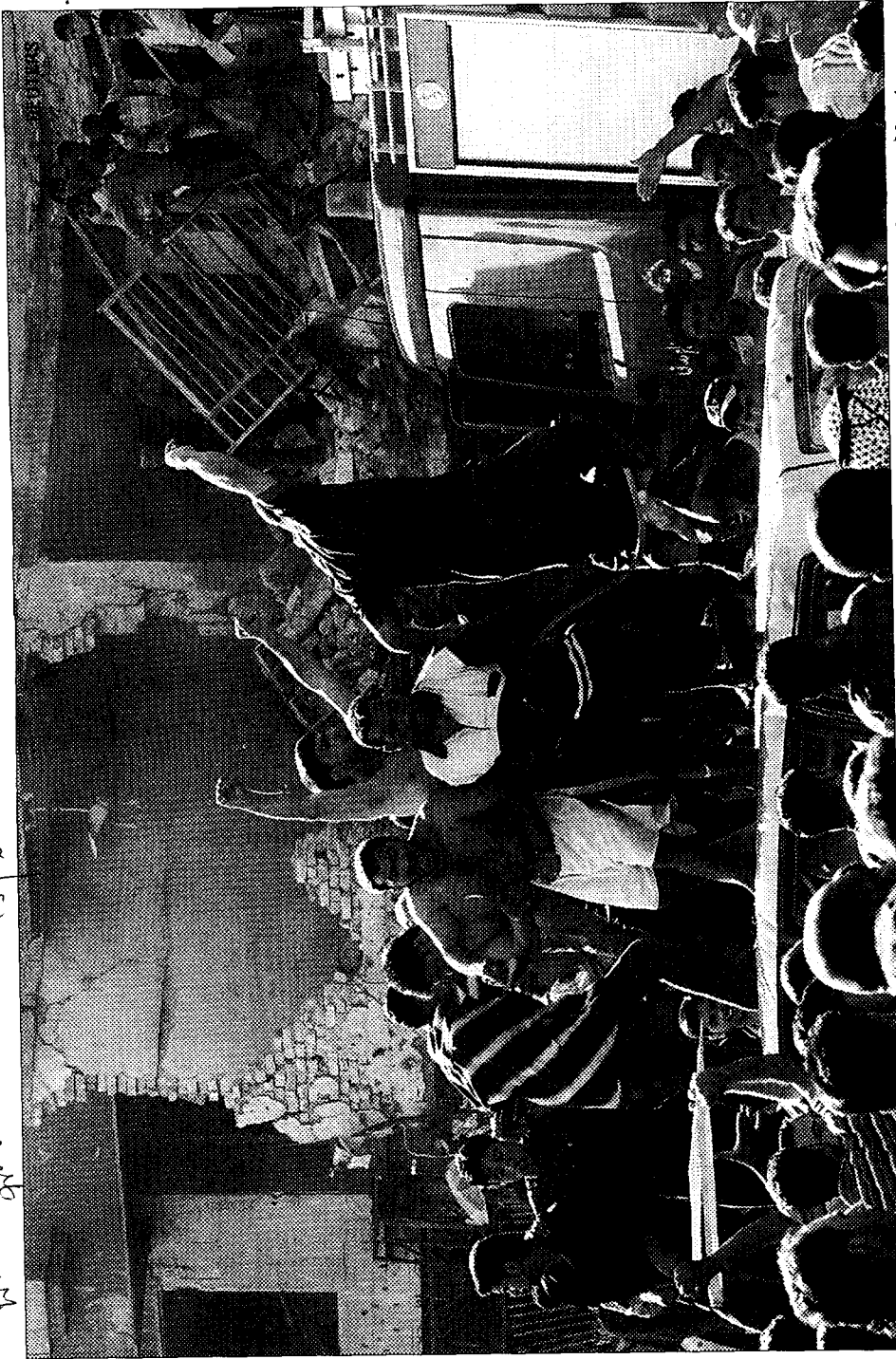
The Baghdad explosion — the second major blast in 24 hours — brought down part of a building and destroyed a row of shops, including a liquor store, in crowded Sadoun Street on the east bank of the Tigris river.

At least seven Iraqis died in a suicide car bomb near a US-led coalition base in the capital on Sunday. Some 30 minutes after the early Monday attack, a civilian was killed when a bomb exploded and gunfire hit a coalition convoy in eastern Baghdad.

US and Iraqi officials have warned of an upsurge in violence ahead of the June 30 handover of sovereignty in Iraq, now barely two weeks away. The Sadoun Street blast targeted passing four-wheel-drive vehicles of the type favoured by the US-led coalition.

A US military spokeswoman said five foreign security contractors, including two British, one French and one American, were killed. A diplomatic source identified the fifth foreign victim as a Filipino.

"Their bodies have been taken to a morgue at Baghdad airport," the diplomat said, adding that the five contractors had been work-



Frenzied Iraqis chant anti-America slogans in front of a building damaged by the car bomb explosion in Baghdad's Sadoun Street on Monday.

Annans appeal to OIC

UN Secretary General Kofi Annan on Monday called on members of the world's largest Islamic organisation to support the new Iraqi government that takes power next month. "I appeal to you to respond positively to the interim government's request for support, Annan said in a message to the foreign ministers at the Organisation of Islamic Conference summit in Istanbul.

in a small Volkswagen Brasilia drove between the cars and blew himself up," Saleh said.

An angry mob quickly crowded around the two other vehicles that stood charred but intact on the road. Chanting "No, no, America! No, no, Governing Council," the Iraqis hit the vehicles with sticks and threw stones.

Earlier in the morning five bus loads of prisoners left the notorious Abu Ghraib prison outside the capital.

saw a charred corpse in a burnt vehicle and four bodies covered in sheets at the site of the blast in the street lined with restaurants, shops and houses.

The vehicle convoy was heading down the street, not far from the main headquarters of the US-led coalition across the river, when the explosion struck.

Major Mohammed Saleh, the senior policeman at the scene, said: "It was a three-car American convoy. A suicide car bomber

ing for a security firm hired by the US company General Electric. Three foreigners were wounded, said Prime Minister Iyad Allawi, adding that they had been helping to rebuild Iraq's patchy electricity sector that was almost devastated in the war.

A tally by three other local hospitals counted at least 11 Iraqis killed in the attack and 56 people injured, including a Nigerian, a Sudanese and three Iraqi women. A photographer

EDUCATION MINISTRY OFFICIAL ASSASSINATED

Suicide bomber kills 12 in Iraq

Associated Press

BAGHDAD, June 13. — A suicide car-bomber killed at least 12 people today near a US garrison in Baghdad and gunmen assassinated a senior education ministry official in a day that also included a rocket attack on the Green Zone and ambushes around the capital. A US helicopter crashed but the crew survived.

Two other top Iraqi officials narrowly escaped death in what appears to be a campaign to target key figures in the new Iraqi administration as it prepares to take power on 30 June.

The suicide attack near the US army's Camp

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Cuervo in eastern Baghdad was the 15th car-bombing in Iraq since the start of the month, US officials said. The 12 dead included four policemen, officials said, but there were no American casualties.

Thirteen Iraqis were injured in the blast, which occurred at 9.15 a.m. after police flagged down a vehicle traveling on the wrong side of the road. The driver detonated the explosives as police approached.

Kamal Al-Jarah (63), the education ministry official in charge of contacts with foreign governments and the U.N., was fatally shot early today outside his home in the city's Ghazaliya district, a predominantly Sunni

neighbourhood where support for Saddam Hussein had been strong.

Al-Jarah's death occurred one day after Iraq's deputy foreign minister, Bassam Salih Kubba, was mortally wounded in another Sunni neighbourhood while driving to work. The foreign ministry blamed Saddam loyalists for the killing. "These assassinations are an attempt to stop the march of Iraq toward complete sovereignty," industry minister Hakim al-Hasni told Al-Arabiya television. "They are not a resistance because they are resisting their own people. They are killing the highly qualified people. What kind of a resistance is this?"

In Washington, Secretary of State Gen. Colin Powell said US forces would do "everything we can to try to defeat these murderers". He, however, added that "it was hard to protect an entire government". Underscoring those difficulties, a rocket exploded today in the Green Zone, causing minor damage to the Republican Palace where US administrator Mr L Paul Bremer maintains his offices. There were no reports of casualties.

In addition to the assassinations — the first against top government officials since the new leadership was appointed on 1 June — two other senior figures escaped death in separate attacks over the weekend.

The chief of Iraq's border police, Maj. Gen. Hussein Mustafa Abdulkareem, was slightly wounded Saturday in a shooting in Baghdad.



Friends and relatives carry the coffin of Kamal Al-Jarah, Iraq's ministry of education's director of cultural relations, in Baghdad's Azamiya district on Sunday — AFP

THE STATESMAN

10 JUN 2003

New Iraqi regime only interim, not sovereign

By Amit Baruah

It's certainly interim, but doesn't appear to be sovereign.

The United Nations Security Council, in Resolution 1546, describes the new dispensation that will take over Iraq by June 30, as the "sovereign interim Government of Iraq". With the United States seeking an exit strategy from Iraq and no longer averse to allowing a 'role' for the United Nations, the Security Council, after the bitter acrimony that was seen at the end of 2002 and in 2003, has tried to 'legitimise' the U.S.-led occupation of Iraq.

The U.N. Secretary-General's envoy, Lakhdar Brahimi, was allowed to 'select' a new Prime Minister and he chose Iyad Allawi, a man who has had extensive contacts with the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). A *New York Times* report, carried by the *International Herald Tribune* on June 10, quoted former CIA officials as saying that Mr. Allawi's outfit, the Iraqi National Accord, had planted bombs in Iraq in the 1990s. The CIA recruited Mr. Allawi in 1992, former intelligence officials said in the news report.

"Allawi's group ... used car bombs and other explosive devices smuggled into Baghdad from northern Iraq," the officials said. Mr. Allawi was also favoured because he served as a counter-point to Ahmed Chalabi, another U.S. favoured Iraqi, now said to have been supplying intelligence information to the Iranians.

Interestingly, the new Prime Minister is said to have run an expensive public relations campaign in Washington to garner

support for himself. A report on the *USA Today* website, posted on June 2, said Mr. Allawi benefited from at least \$340,000 in spending for Washington lawyers and lobbyists and New York public relations agents, all paid for by a wealthy Iraqi expatriate. "The lobbying was coordinated by the consulting business of Patrick Theros, a former U.S. ambassador to the country of Qatar who knew Allawi. It hired the law firm of Preston Gates Ellis & Rouvelas Meeds and the New York public relations firm of Brown Lloyd James. Theros referred inquiries to PR representatives in the Persian Gulf who could not be re-

NEWS ANALYSIS

ached," *USA Today* said.

Lobbying records show that the law firm engaged in a flurry of contacts on Mr. Allawi's behalf beginning late October. Most were aimed at setting up meetings with influential members of Congress and their staffs, administration officials, think tanks and journalists. Apart from contacts with top Senators and Congressmen, other calls went to officials at the National Security Council, the Vice-President, Dick Cheney's office, the Defence Department, the CIA and three influential Washington think tanks: the American Enterprise Institute, Heritage Foundation and Brookings Institution, the report added. With such a background, legitimate questions can be raised whether Mr. Allawi is credible enough to steer Iraq out of a very difficult security and political situation.

In a situation where ordinary Iraqis want an end to the occupation of their country, the new Prime Minister will have to prove that he's up to the daunting task of providing credible governance. Iraqis want their own government, legitimate, credible and elected — not one run by American proxy.

Of course, it is possible that Mr. Allawi may find himself with no other choice but to publicly toe an Iraqi line just to continue in office. Official circles in New Delhi are watching the "change of guard" in Iraq carefully. They believe that the new Government faces a very difficult task and its credibility will depend on how ordinary Iraqis respond to the situation.

On the subject of credible government in Iraq, while Security Council Resolution 1546 refers to a 'multinational' force, it also recognises the reality that the U.S. is the governing spirit behind the 'multinational' force. Clause 31 in the resolution 'requests' that the U.S., "on behalf of the multinational force," report to the Security Council within three months from the date of the resolution on the efforts and progress of this force, and on quarterly basis thereafter.

Till December 31, 2005, when a constitutionally elected Iraqi Government is mandated to be in place by the Security Council resolution, the U.S. will be "in charge" of the multinational force. The issue really is about ending the occupation — and that can happen only when the Americans and the rest of the occupying troops leave Iraq. That will mark the return of full sovereignty to the Iraqi people.

Top diplomat killed in blow to new Iraq regime

Baghdad, June 12 (Reuters): Gunmen killed a top Iraqi diplomat today in the first high-profile assassination in Iraq since an interim government took over on June 1.

Attackers fatally wounded Bassam Qubba, the foreign ministry's director-general, as he was on his way to work from his home in Baghdad's mainly Sunni Adhamiya district.

US officials say insurgents, who often target Iraqis seen as cooperating with the Americans, are likely to step up attacks before Iraq's occupation formally ends on June 30.

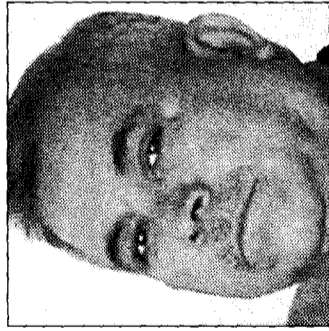
In other lawlessness, kidnappers killed a Lebanese citizen, Hussein Ali Alyan, 28 and two of his Iraqi colleagues, after seizing them in Baghdad on Thursday, a

Lebanese diplomat said. Foreign ministry sources in Beirut said the bodies of the men, who worked for a Lebanese telecommunications company, had been dumped between Falluja and Ramadi, west of the capital.

But the ordeal of seven Turks kidnapped in Falluja five days ago ended in their release today, a Turkish diplomat said. The seven employees of a Turkish contracting firm were in good health.

There was no word on who had seized them or why.

Foreign ministry spokesman Thamer al-Adhami said Qubba's assailants had overtaken his car and fired as they drove past, wounding the official in the waist. His driver took him to hospital, where he died soon after



Bassam Qubba

arrival. Qubba, a Shia, was appointed to his post two months ago. He was a veteran career diplomat who served as ambassador to China during Saddam Hussein's Baathist rule.

Gunmen killed another ca-

reer diplomat, Aqila al-Hashemi, in September, just weeks after she became a member of Iraq's US-appointed governing council, which is now defunct.

In other attacks today, a roadside bomb wounded three Iraqi policemen and a civilian in Baquba, 65 km north of Baghdad.

Yesterday, the army said, 25 insurgents attacked a police station south of Baghdad, scaring away officers with warning shots before stealing items including rifles and a television and demolishing much of the building with explosives.

The new interim government, which set security as its top priority when it was sworn in on June 1, has won cautious backing from radical Shia cleric

Moqtada al-Sadr.

"We accept the interim government if it rejects the occupation and sets a timeframe for its withdrawal," Sheikh Jaber al-Khataji said in a Friday sermon delivered on Sadr's behalf in Kufa, near the holy city of Najaf. Iraq's interim Prime Minister, Iyad Allawi, has promised tough action against Sadr if his Mehdi Army militia, which launched an anti-US revolt in April, pursues violence.

Sadr had previously denounced the interim government as a puppet of the US, removing another cloud over Allawi's government. Kurds have dropped their threat to leave it in protest at the failure of this week's new UN resolution to mention Kurdish autonomy.



A girl carries her brother after receiving free medical help from American and Thai doctors in Karbala. (AFP)

উচ্চপদস্থ কূটনীতিক নিহত ইরাকে

বাগদাদ, ১২ জুন— ইরাকের অন্তর্বর্তী সরকারের এক উচ্চপদস্থ কূটনীতিক আজ দুফুতীদের গুলিতে প্রাণ হারিয়েছেন। সেপ্টেম্বর মাসে পূর্বতন গভর্নিং কাউন্সিলের সদস্য আকিলা আল হাশেমি-হত্যার পর এই প্রথম সরকারের সঙ্গে প্রত্যক্ষ ভাবে জড়িত কোনও ব্যক্তি ইরাকে খুন হলেন। এ ছাড়া, দুই ইরাকি সহকর্মী-সহ লেবাননের এক নাগরিক আজ নিহত হন। গত বৃহস্পতিবার তাঁদের অপহরণ করা হয়েছিল। পাশাপাশি, আজই তুরস্কের সাত জন অপহৃত নাগরিককে মুক্তি দিয়েছে অজ্ঞাতপরিচয় জঙ্গিদের একটি গোষ্ঠী।

নিহত কূটনীতিক বাসসাম কুবা সাদামের আমলে চিনে ইরাকের রাষ্ট্রদূত হিসেবে কাজ করেছেন। বিগত দু'মাস তিনি ইরাকি বিদেশ মন্ত্রকের ডিরেক্টর-জেনারেল পদে ছিলেন।

আজ বাগদাদের সুন্নি অধ্যুষিত এলাকা আধমিয়া থেকে কাজে যোগ দিতে যাওয়ার সময় আততায়ীরা ধাওয়া করে তাঁর গাড়িকে ছাড়িয়ে যায় এবং সামনে থেকে

তাঁর দিকে গুলি ছোড়ে। হাসপাতালে নিয়ে যাওয়ার পরই তাঁর মৃত্যু হয়। বাকুবায় দু'টি পৃথক বিস্ফোরণের ঘটনায় এক নাগরিক-সহ তিন জন পুলিশ এবং দু'জন ইরাকি সেনা আহত হয়েছেন।

অন্য দিকে, একটি টেলিকমিউনিকেশন সংস্থায় কর্মরত দুই ইরাকি এবং এক জন লেবানীয় নাগরিকের মৃতদেহ আজ ফালুজা এবং রামাদির মধ্যবর্তী অঞ্চল থেকে পাওয়া যায়।

বিদ্রোহী শিয়া নেতা মোকতাদা আল সদর এবং কুর্দ গোষ্ঠীর নেতারা পৃথক ভাবে অন্তর্বর্তী সরকারের সঙ্গে অসহযোগিতার পথ থেকে সরে দাঁড়ানোর ইঙ্গিত দিয়েছেন। এতে আলাউয়ি সরকারের উপর থেকে চাপ অনেকটাই কমে গেল বলে মনে করা হচ্ছে।

কুফায় শুক্রবারের প্রার্থনানুষ্ঠানে আল সদরের পক্ষে শেখ জাবের আল খাফাজি ঘোষণা করেন, “যদি সরকার দখলদারদের পরিত্যাগ করে এবং তাদের দেশ ছেড়ে যাওয়ার ব্যাপারে একটি সময়সীমা নির্ধারণ

করে, তা হলে আমরা তাকে স্বাগত জানাব।”

আগে অবশ্য এই অন্তর্বর্তী সরকারকে মার্কিন নিয়ন্ত্রণাধীন পুতুল হিসেবেই দেখছিলেন তাঁরা। আলাউয়িও ঘোষণা করেছিলেন, হিংসা চালিয়ে গেলে মাহদি বাহিনীর বিরুদ্ধে কঠোর ব্যবস্থা নেবেন তিনি।

রাষ্ট্রপুঞ্জের ইরাক প্রস্তাবে দেশের উত্তরাংশে তাঁদের স্বায়ত্তশাসনের বিষয়টি উল্লিখিত হয়নি বলে, সরকারের প্রতি অসহযোগের অবস্থান থেকে বেরিয়ে এসেছেন কুর্দরাও।

কাল তুর্কি ও খ্রিস্টান নেতাদের সঙ্গে আরবিল শহরে বৈঠকের পর কুর্দ নেতারা জানান, প্রস্তাবে যে যুক্তরাষ্ট্রীয় কাঠামোর কথা বলা হয়েছে, তাতে তাঁদের আকাঙ্ক্ষা খানিকটা চরিতার্থ হবে। এ ছাড়া, স্বায়ত্তশাসনের স্পষ্টতর আশ্বাসের অনুপস্থিতির কারণে সরকার থেকে পুরোপুরি সরে আসার সিদ্ধান্ত বদল করছেন তাঁরা।

— রয়টার্স

ভাবের ঘরে চুরি

Wazim
Gnan
30/6/2014

ইরাক সম্পর্কে রাষ্ট্রপুঞ্জের নিরাপত্তা পরিষদে যে প্রস্তাবটি পাশ হইয়াছে তাহার বৈশিষ্ট্য একটিই। যাহাতে এই প্রস্তাবে কাহারও আপত্তি না থাকে, ভেটো না পড়ে, সেই ভাবেই প্রস্তাবটি তৈয়ারি করিয়া লওয়া হইয়াছে। কিন্তু তাহার ফলে এই প্রস্তাবের কার্যকারিতা লইয়া গভীর সংশয় দেখা দিয়াছে। 'নির্দিষ্ট দিনে' ইরাকে সার্বভৌম সরকার গড়িবার প্রস্তুতি শুরু হইবে, তাহার পর সংবিধান নির্মাণের প্রক্রিয়া এবং চূড়ান্ত পর্যায়ে 'সম্পূর্ণ স্বাধীন ইরাক সরকার' গঠন— কর্মসূচিটি শুনিতে চমৎকার। কিন্তু তাহাতে প্রকৃত শান্তি ও শৃঙ্খলা ফিরিবে কি? সার্বভৌমত্ব কি এমন ভাবে প্রতিষ্ঠা করা যায়? ইরাকে ক্ষমতা হস্তান্তরের দিন যতই আগাইয়া আসিতেছে, দেশের বিভিন্ন স্থানে গেরিলা হানার সংখ্যা তাহার সহিত পাল্লা দিয়া ক্রমবর্ধমান। আত্মঘাতী হানার সংখ্যাও দিনের পর দিন বাড়িতেছে। পাশাপাশি, ইরাকের নয়া প্রধানমন্ত্রী আলওয়ি প্রকাশ্যেই বলিয়াছেন, সাদ্দামকে ক্ষমতাচ্যুত করিবার সময় ইরাকের সেনা, পুলিশ এবং অন্তর্দেশীয় নিরাপত্তা বিভাগকে ভাঙিয়া দেওয়া গুরুতর অন্যায় হইয়াছে। তিনি এ কথাও বলিয়াছেন যে প্রয়োজনে তিনি সাদ্দামের বাথ পার্টি হইতেও কিছু লোককে ফিরাইয়া আনিবেন। এই বিবৃতি হইতেই স্পষ্ট, আইন শৃঙ্খলা রক্ষার সমস্যা সমকালীন ইরাকে কী ভীষণ আকার ধারণ করিয়াছে। ইরাক আক্রমণের কালে ঘটা করিয়া দেশের পুনর্গঠনের কথা বলা হইয়াছিল। সেই আরম্ভ কর্মটি সুসম্পন্ন না করিয়া যদি জেটসেনা হাত ধুইয়া চলিয়া আসিবার প্রহর গোনে, তাহা দুর্ভাগ্যজনক হইবে বইকী!

গভীরতর বিচারে প্রশ্ন ইহা নয় যে ৩০ জুনের মধ্যে জেটসেনা দায়িত্বভার নয়া সরকারের হস্তে সঁপিয়া ইরাক ছাড়িবে কি না। প্রশ্ন ইহাই যে মার্কিন নেতৃত্বাধীন জেটসেনা যখন বিপুল দূরত্ব পাড়ি দিয়া দেশটিকে কার্যত ধূলিসাৎ করিয়াছে, তখন সেই দেশের পুনর্নির্মাণের দায়টিও সেই সব রাষ্ট্রের ক্ষেত্রই থাকা উচিত। বস্তুত আছেও। যুদ্ধোত্তর ইরাকের পুনর্গঠনের ব্যাপারে ওই সব দেশ, বিশেষ করিয়া আক্রমণের মূল হোতা মার্কিন যুক্তরাষ্ট্র আপন দায় এড়াইতে পারে না। ইরাকে সার্বভৌম সরকার ক্ষমতায় আসিলেও জেটসেনা তাহার বন্দিদের সেই সরকারের হাতে তুলিয়া দিবে না বলিয়া ইতিমধ্যেই একটি বিবৃতি আসিয়াছে। রাষ্ট্রপুঞ্জ কী বলিল, প্রেসিডেন্ট বুশ নিশ্চয়ই এ ব্যাপারে তাহার অপেক্ষায় বসিয়া ছিলেন না। তাহা হইলে ইরাকের পুনর্গঠনের ব্যাপারেই বা একই

রকম উৎসাহ দেখানো হইবে না কেন? আক্রমণের সময় আন্তর্জাতিক দুনিয়ার তোয়াক্কা করিব না, আক্রমণের পরে দেশ ছাড়িবার লগ্নে কাজ সম্পূর্ণ না করিয়াই বহু দেশের সানন্দ একমত্যা লইয়া হাত ধুইয়া ফেলিবার আয়োজন করিব, ইহা কেমন দ্বিচারিতা? 'সর্বসম্মত' প্রস্তাব পাশ করাইয়া 'সব কিছু ঠিক ঠিক চলিতেছে' বলিয়া ভাবের ঘরে চুরি করিয়া লাভ নাই, দায়িত্ব এই বাবে এড়ানো যায় না।

সর্বসম্মতির জন্য প্রেসিডেন্ট বুশের তাগিদটি সহজবোধ্য। দেশে মিলিয়া কাজ করিবার মাহাত্ম্য সমধিক, এবং এমন নহে যে তাহা মার্কিন প্রেসিডেন্টের অজানা। সুতরাং, ইরাক-সংক্রান্ত বিষয়ে রাষ্ট্রপুঞ্জের প্রস্তাব গ্রহণের ঠিক পূর্বাঙ্কে তিনি যদি বারংবার আন্তর্জাতিক দুনিয়ার কথা পাড়িয়া থাকেন, ইরাকের ব্যাপারে আন্তর্জাতিক একমত্যা গড়িয়া তুলিবার উপরে জোর দিয়া থাকেন, ঙ্কুঞ্চনের হেতু কী? ইহা ভাল কথা যে মার্কিন প্রেসিডেন্ট আন্তর্জাতিক দুনিয়ার সহিত একই সুরে ইরাকের ভবিষ্যৎ স্থির করিবার কথা ভাবিতেছেন। অথচ, ঘটনা হইল যে দুনিয়া জুড়িয়াই এ ব্যাপারে ঙ্কুঞ্চন হইতেছে। এমন কুঞ্চনের কারণটি অবশ্য বিশেষ জটিল নহে। ইহা বস্তুত প্রগাঢ় বিশ্বয়জনিত। জগৎবাসী সমধিক বিস্মিত বলিয়াই ঙ্কুঞ্চন করিতেছেন। প্রেসিডেন্ট জর্জ ডবলিউ বুশ এত কাল ইরাক-প্রশ্নে আন্তর্জাতিক জনমতের ধার ধারেন নাই। রাষ্ট্রপুঞ্জে বিভিন্ন দেশের বিপুল বিরোধিতার মুখে দাঁড়াইয়াও তিনি ইরাকে মজুত বিপুল পরিমাণ গণধ্বংসী মারণাস্ত্রের কাহিনি ফাঁদিয়া বাগদাদ আক্রমণের জিগির তুলিয়াছিলেন। দেশটিকে আপাদমস্তক গুঁড়াইয়া দিয়াও কোনও অস্ত্র মেলে নাই, এবং গোয়েন্দা-তথ্যাদির অসারতা প্রমাণিত হওয়ায় সি আই এ প্রধানকেও সরিতে হইয়াছে। তদুপরি ইরাকেরই আবু গ্রাইব কারাগারে মার্কিন রক্ষী কর্তৃক ইরাকি বন্দিদের উপর নারকীয় নির্যাতনের বৃত্তান্ত গণমাধ্যমে ফাঁস হইয়া যাওয়ায় বিশ্ব জুড়িয়াই প্রতিবাদের ঝড় বহিয়াছে, ইরাকিরাও উপলব্ধি করিয়াছে সভ্যতার আলোকপ্রাপ্ত ধারক হিসাবে যাঁহারা আসিয়াছেন, তাঁহাদের নিজস্ব সভ্যতাবোধ লইয়াই বিস্তর প্রশ্ন উঠিতে পারে। এই অবস্থায় প্রেসিডেন্ট জর্জ ডব্লিউ বুশ যদি হঠাৎই মার্কিন আত্মস্তরিতা বর্জন করিয়া আন্তর্জাতিক দেশগুলির একমত্যা লাভ করিতে ব্যস্ত হইয়া উঠেন, তৎকালে ঙ্কুঞ্চন হয়, চাপা হাস্যবেগও সহসা উছলাইয়া উঠিতে পারে। আগামী কয়েক সপ্তাহের ঘটনাবলি দেখাইয়া দিবে, এই হাস্য সঙ্গত না অসঙ্গত।

ANADARAZA

11 JUN 2014

Iraq rift rips veil off new G-8 unity

Handwritten: 11/6

Sea Island (Georgia): World leaders are pledging a united effort to promote democracy and prosperity across the larger Middle East, but the rare show of unity masks lingering discord on both that plan and, more urgently, on ways to support Iraq.

French President Jacques Chirac objected to President George Bush's suggestion that Nato take a greater role in Iraq. But Bush aides said they expected to find some common ground on the issue before a Nato summit later this month in



Bush



Blair

Turkey. Leaders of the Group of Eight countries - Britain, Canada, Italy, France, Germany, Japan, Russia and the United States - were wrapping up their summit dominated by the Middle East with a session with African leaders on Thursday.

The G-8 was expected to endorse proposals, including a new initiative to attack famine and a US proposal to train more than 50,000 new peacekeepers in the next five years. The world leaders already endorsed support for research on an AIDS vaccine. After weeks of bad news out of Iraq, Bush claimed a victo-

ry as the summit began, when the U N Security Council on Tuesday unanimously approved a resolution granting legitimacy to the new Iraqi interim government. Bush also invited Iraq's president, Ghazi al-Yawer, to the summit.

In their private discussions, Bush and al-Yawer discussed Iraqi reconstruction and the country's relations with Syria and Iran, said a senior US administration official present at the session. Iraqis with close ties to Syria should try to persuade Syria "to be more responsi-

ble" in terms of guarding its border to keep militants from entering Iraq, said the official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity. During a picture-taking session, Al-Yawer told Bush that his country was "moving in steady steps" toward democracy. Bush called the meeting "a special day" because "I really never thought I'd be sitting next to an Iraqi president of a free country a year and half ago. And here you are."

Bush did not elaborate on what he meant by an expanded role for Nato now that an interim Iraqi government is in place. Agencies

Iraq debuts at G-8

Reuters

Sea Island (Georgia), June 9

PRESIDENT BUSH, fresh from gaining passage of a critical UN resolution on Iraq, introduces the new President of Iraq to fellow leaders at the Group of Eight summit on Wednesday.

At the same time, G-8 negotiators were working to complete the details of an initiative urging Arab and Muslim leaders in West Asia and North Africa to adopt democratic reforms.

Iraq's new President, Ghazi al-Yawar, will make his first entrance on the world stage when he has lunch with Bush and leaders from Afghanistan, Bahrain, Jordan, Tunisia, Turkey and Yemen. He will then be introduced to the other G-8 leaders.

The Iraq war led to bitter divisions between the US and long-time allies, but Bush is hoping the leaders will now focus on the future and help put an international stamp on Iraq, beset by car bombings and bloodshed before the June 30 transfer of power to an interim government. With the UN resolution formally ending the occupation on June 30, "the international community showed that it stands side by side with the Iraqi people", said Bush.

British Prime Minister Tony Blair, Bush's main ally in the

HE-13 10/6

work done ①

IRAQ UPDATE

- ▶ Rebels on Wednesday killed 12 members of a local security force in Fallujah. The attack is believed to be the first time that Gen. Mohammed Latif's Fallujah Brigade had come under fire since it set out to impose security in the city last month. A US convoy also came under sniper fire in a Baghdad suburb
- ▶ Iraq's new government acquired a further semblance of legitimacy when the UN Security Council on Tuesday voted unanimously to support the transfer of sovereignty from the US-led occupation
- ▶ Saboteurs blew up two oil pipelines on Wednesday
- ▶ UK Foreign Secretary Jack Straw said a further British troop deployment in Iraq is 'not inevitable'. Britain has some 8,900 troops in the occupied country, the largest force after America's

war, said on Tuesday it was time to bury the divisions of the past. He and Bush were to have breakfast on Wednesday. "Let us unite now in a different vision for a modern Iraq capable of being that force for good for Iraqis and also for the wider region and the world," Blair said.

The G-8 is comprised of the US, Britain, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Canada and Russia. The leaders, meeting at the Sea Island resort on the Georgia coast, will meet leaders from Afghanistan, Bahrain, Jordan, Tunisia, Turkey and Yemen to discuss the Bush's West Asia initiative. The initiative has been the subject of meticulous nego-

tiations for six months and the US had to rewrite some of it to satisfy European concerns. One change that was made was to emphasise job creation.

Arab leaders have been concerned the initiative would be seen as an attempt to impose Western-style reforms on Arab and Muslim governments.

Officials were still working on the final text, and an agreement could be reached as early as Wednesday. US officials said summit negotiators were also close to an agreement on a plan to stop the spread of nukes. The proposal would suspend for one year all new transfers of equipment for uranium enrichment.

9 JUN 2004

Rebels

LUKE BAKER
BAGHDAD, JUNE 8

TWO car bomb attacks killed 13 Iraqis and a US soldier on Tuesday ahead of a UN Security Council vote that was expected to approve a resolution on the country's move from occupation to sovereignty. In Mosul, three men in a taxi blew up their vehicle near the Mayor's office. The US Military said at least 10 Iraqis were killed and 100 wounded.

An hour earlier, a car bomb exploded in Baquba killing four Iraqis and a US soldier and injuring 11. US officials say they expect a surge of attacks ahead of the handover of sovereignty on June 30. Discussions at the Security Council on a resolution endorsing the political process have been complicated by international wrangling and by divisions within Iraq.

France said on Tuesday it

kill 14 in Iraq before UN vote

that disputes over the resolution did not overshadow a summit by the Group of Eight industrial nations in Sea Island, Georgia.

At issue was how much control Baghdad's new leaders would have over major US-run military operations after June 30. France, backed by Germany and others, proposed the resolution spell out that the new Iraqi leaders could exercise a virtual veto over US-led "sensitive offensive operations".

The US rejected this but agreed on Monday to add wording on the relationship between Iraq and the US command that reflects letters between Iraq and the US.

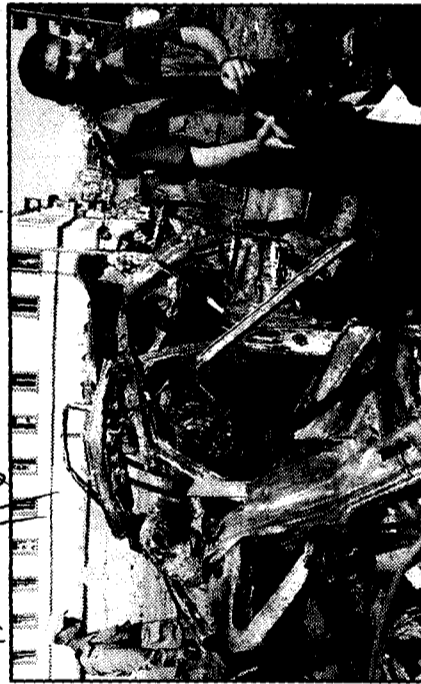
The letters from US Secretary of State Colin Powell and Iraqi PM Iyad Allawi pledged the US commander and Iraqi leaders would consult and coordinate "fundamental security and policy issues including policy on sensitive offensive operations" through a new security committee.

The draft resolution also gives the interim government the right to order the multinational force out of Iraq and makes clear that its mandate will expire in January 2006. In an open council meeting on Monday, Lakhdar Brahimi, the UN envoy to Iraq, reported on his mission to help appoint members of the new interim government.

Hours before he spoke, nine Iraqi militia of more than 100,000 fighters agreed to disband as part of a retraining program.

The accord includes all of Iraq's largest private political armies, including the Peshmerga fighters of the country's two Kurdish parties, the main Shiite militia and several smaller ones.

However, the deal does not include rebel cleric Moqtada Al-Sadr's fighters, the Mehdi Army group. That militia launched an uprising against occupying troops across southern Iraq two months ago.



Iraqi police investigate the scene of a car bombing in Mosul on Tuesday. A suicide car bomb exploded in front of the Mayor's office killing 10 civilians and wounding around 100. Reuters

would vote in favour, even though it was not satisfied. "This will not prevent us giving a positive vote in New York to help find a positive way out of this tragedy," Foreign Minister Michel Barnier said.

The Bush administration was keen for a vote early this week so

98-29116
M. BAKER

— Reuters

Let Iraq be free, Pope tells Bush

Associated Press
Rome, June 4

POPE JOHN Paul II reminded President Bush on Friday of the Vatican's opposition to the war in Iraq and said the world has been troubled by recent "deplorable events", an apparent reference to the abuse of Iraqi prisoners by US troops.

Sitting alongside the President, the Pope called for a speedy return of the country's sovereignty and said the recent appointment of an interim Iraqi government was an "encouraging step". "It is the evident desire of everyone that this situation now be normalised as quickly as possible with the active participation of the international community and, in particular, the United Nations Organisation, in order to ensure a speedy return of Iraq's sovereignty, in conditions of security for all its people," the Pope said.

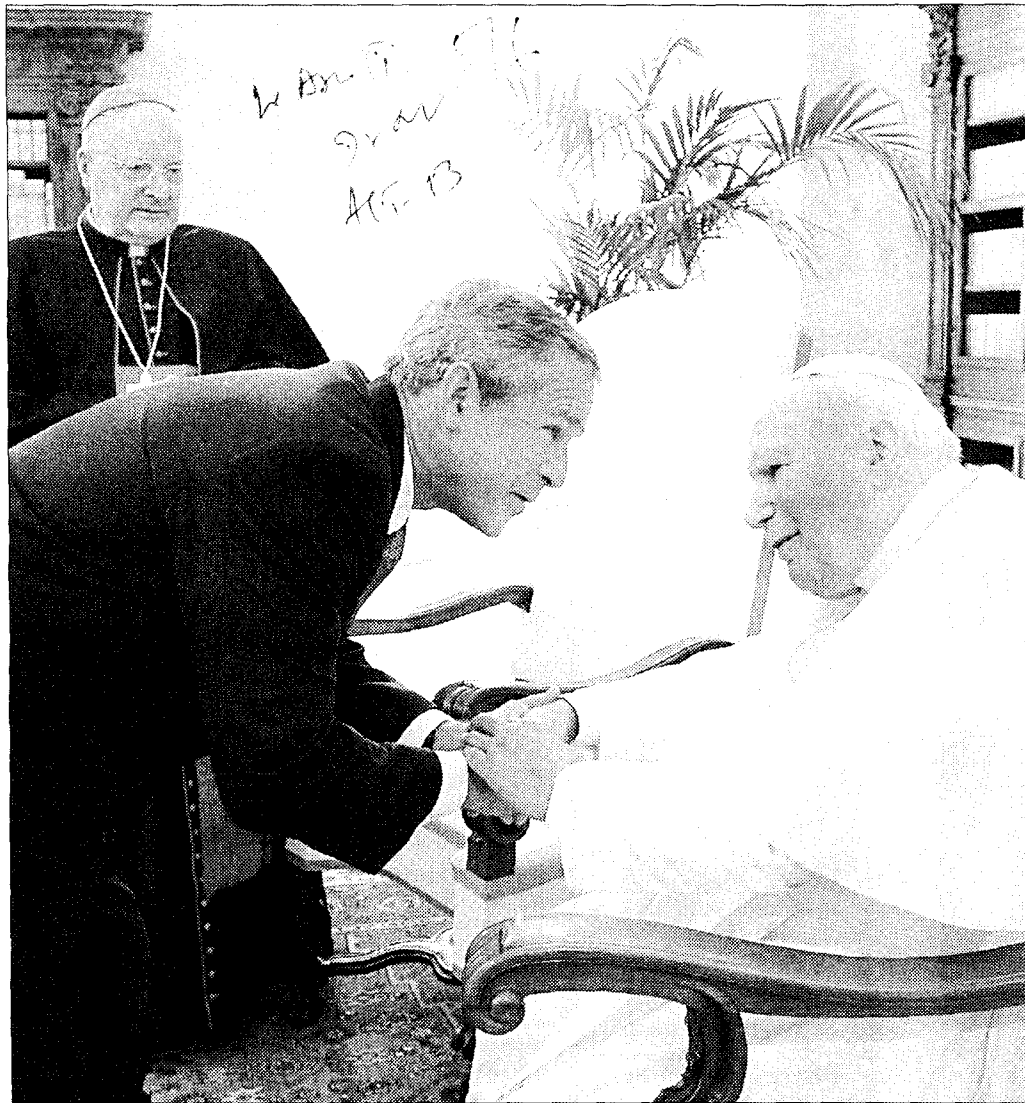
In an indirect reference to US troops' abuse of Iraqi prisoners, the Pope said, "In the past few weeks, other deplorable events have come to light which have troubled the civic and religious conscience of all." He said those events "made more difficult a serene and resolute commitment to shared human values. In the absence of such a commitment, neither war nor terrorism will ever be overcome."

A senior White House official said Bush did not feel stung by the Pope's remarks. Rather, White House officials took the indirect reference to Abu Ghraib as an affirmation of their own statements that the abuses were "deplorable", the official said.

Calling the pontiff "a devoted servant of God", Bush presented him with the Presidential Medal of Freedom, America's highest civilian award. "We appreciate the strong symbol of freedom that you have stood for and we recognise the power of freedom to change societies and to change the world," Bush said.

The President sat stoically as the Pope, seated in front of a microphone, read his statement in a voice that was audible, but not easily understood. The hands of the 84-year-old pope, who suffers from Parkinson's disease, trembled as he addressed the President and first lady Laura Bush, slowly, often one word at a time.

"Mr President, your visit to Rome takes place at a moment of great concern for the continuing situation of grave unrest in West Asia, both in Iraq and in



President Bush greets the Pope as Vatican State secretary Cardinal Angelo Sodano on Friday.

AFP

Nuke football in Vatican's hallowed halls

WHILE BUSH and Pope John Paul talked peace in the Vatican on Friday, a military aide held a bulky black attaché case containing the codes the US President would need in order to launch a nuclear war.

It is known as "the football". It has been all over the world and on Friday it entered the hallowed halls of the Vatican. It was never very far from the President. While he and the Pope were speaking alone in the pontiff's private study, it was in the next room.

And when Bush and the

the Holy Land," said the Pope, who also joined the President in honoring the sacrifices of

Pope delivered speeches and Bush awarded the pope the Presidential Medal of Freedom, it rested on the shiny marble floor between the firm legs of Major Paul Montanus of the US Marine Corps.

Sometimes a leather strap links "the football" from the military aide's wrist to the handle of the soft leather case. But there was no strap visible on Friday. Apparently Montanus felt safe enough in the Vatican, under the frescoes of Renaissance masters.

In 1987, when former Presi-

American soldiers who have given their lives in defense of Europe. Later, Bush was to meet

dent Ronald Reagan visited the Vatican and the Soviet Union still existed, the Army major carrying "the football" didn't let it out of his grasp — not even for a second.

That man approached the Pope ramrod straight and shook hands with the pontiff with his right hand while holding "the football" with his left. Asked on Friday why the leather strap was not being used, Montanus said with a sly smile: "We have various ways of keeping track of it."

Reuters, Vatican City

with Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi, a staunch supporter and US ally in the war.

Fortress Rome greets Prez

SECURITY FORCES turned Rome into a fortress on Friday as anti-war protesters pledged a heated reception for President Bush who began a 36-hour visit here with an audience with Pope John Paul II.

Carabinieri police saturated the historic city centre, with heavy concentrations of the paramilitary force along the main thoroughfares and piazzas, as well as at bridges, rail stations and airports. Helicopters droned overhead.

Around 10,000 anti-war protesters, mostly students, were on the streets early on Friday, but the main demonstration organised by the Communist and Green parties was not scheduled to begin until mid-afternoon. The main centre-left opposition parties, who oppose the visit, said they would not take part in demonstrations out of respect for the US soldiers who died in the liberation of Rome.

Bush's passage to his early morning appointments at the Vatican and the presidential Quirinale palace, where he paid a brief call to his Italian counterpart Carlo Azeglio Ciampi, were unimpeded as security forces outnumbered the early protesters. Special trains from Venice and Naples carrying anti-war demonstrators to Rome were delayed by around 90 minutes in what many protesters felt was a deliberate ploy by the authorities to disrupt planned street protests. Violence was confined to a few isolated incidents. There were no immediate reports of arrests.

AFP, Rome



REUTERS

An anti-war demonstrator in Rome on Friday.

Iraq gets panel to monitor polls

LUKE BAKER
BAGHDAD, JUNE 4

IRAQ named a team on Friday to organise its first free elections in January, the next step in establishing its independence from US military occupation.

The formal selection of the Electoral Commission came three days after the appointment of an interim government.

The new government told the United Nations it wanted the right to decide on the future presence of US-led forces and other security issues. Foreign Minister Hoshiyar Zebari told the UN Security Council in New York that Baghdad wanted the troops to stay, under the terms of a US-British draft resolution on the planned US handover of power to Iraqis.

Zebari said Iraq did not want veto power over actions by US troops but said "we should have a say in endorsing this kind of (major) operation". He also said that Baghdad should have the right to decide how long US-led troops stay in the country, adding that the "premature departure of international troops would lead to chaos and the



US troops lie next to a burning Humvee following an attack in Baghdad on Friday. Four US soldiers were reported to be wounded when a rocket attack destroyed their vehicle. Reuters

possibility of civil war".

"A call for an immediate withdrawal or a fixed timetable for withdrawal would be very, very unhelpful. It would be used by our enemies to complicate problems further," he said. "I think we are going to need these forces for some time, but as a sovereign government this cannot be open forever," he said. "They are not going to stay indefinitely."

Zebari, from the Kurdish mi-

nority that pushed hard for effective veto powers under a transitional Constitution agreed in March, also said that the resolution should endorse that Constitution — something leaders of the majority Shi'ites have objected to.

Washington made it clear again that the sovereignty offered will be subject to 138,000 American soldiers having the last word on any military action. —Reuters

Rumsfeld for 'realistic' expectations

REUTERS
SINGAPORE, JUNE 4

US DEFENCE secretary Donald Rumsfeld on Friday called for more "realistic" expectations on the road towards democracy in Iraq, saying that the prisoner abuse scandal had overshadowed the progress achieved in the country.

Rumsfeld spoke to US troops aboard the helicopter landing ship USS Essex in port, as he visited Singapore for an Asia security conference.

Rumsfeld was asked by one sailor when the US military might go after terrorists in East Asia. "Well, I would hope pretty soon," he said, without providing details. —Reuters

INDIAN EXPRESS

5 JUN 2004

WMD delusions

By David Leigh & David Pallister

THE DUSTBIN of history is crammed full these days. Head-first into the garbage has just gone Ahmed Chalabi, would-be leader of Iraq, now accused of treachery against the United States and of peddling disinformation about non-existent weapons of mass destruction.

Into the bin with him has gone, as we all know by now, a chimerical tangle of irrelevant pipework: so-called aluminium tubes for nuclear bombs; so-called mobile laboratories for spreading germs; and alleged rockets to fire off poison gas within 45 minutes. All these have proved non-existent.

George Tenet, Director of the Central Intelligence Agency, is the latest to take a dive into historical oblivion, announcing his resignation on June 3. His intelligence agency failed to prevent September 11; did not persuade the U.S. President of the truth about Iraq's weapons of mass destruction; and may yet prove to have murdered at least one Iraqi inmate at the notorious Abu Ghraib prison.

Amid all this mass clearout of failures and lies, however, there is one mysterious omission. A secretive CIA-led intelligence body set up to look for stockpiles of Saddam Hussein's secret weapons, the Iraq Sur-

vey Group, is still going strong. This is despite the resignation of its head, David Kay, last January, who said with admirable crispness: "We were all wrong."

Largely unnoticed, the ISG was reconstituted after Mr. Kay's resignation, under a former American Unscorn inspector, Charles Duelfer. In the midst of the abuse scandals

case of war crimes analysts, help for interrogators "to assess the High-Value Detainee's cooperation."

Glen Rangwala, a Cambridge University, England, specialist in WMD, thinks the attempt at commercial recruitment appears to be a novelty.

"In the past, the ISG relied on personal contacts to find people either from the CIA or from former Unscorn

mass destruction programmes."

The ISG certainly appears to be refocusing its efforts on the general industrial infrastructure of Iraq, rather than on getting the imprisoned scientists to lead them to apparently non-existent stockpiles.

Mr. Duelfer told U.S. Senators earlier this year that it was proving virtually impossible to get Iraqi scientists to talk. This is despite the fact that 100 or so "High-Value Detainees" were still held at Camp Cropper at Baghdad airport. A military intelligence general, Maj. Gen. Keith Dayton, shares control of the ISG with Mr. Duelfer.

The military police unit at Camp Cropper was not criticised in the recent leaked U.S. army report on prisoner abuse, but the inmates were being held, at least up to February, in harsh conditions contrary to the Geneva Convention.

They were spending nearly 23 hours a day in solitary confinement in small concrete cells without sunlight, according to a report by the International Committee of the Red Cross. Despite the pressure, they have not provided a smoking gun for the politicians who took us to war. — ©Guardian Newspapers *Limite* 2004

In the face of all the evidence, the Iraq Survey Group is still searching for weapons of mass destruction.

surrounding the CIA's use of civilian interrogators," he said. It is possible, he adds, that the ISG has found some significant new leads. "It seems they are trying to recruit senior-level people, especially in the nuclear field."

Mr. Duelfer himself struck a bullish note to CNN last week. He denied that he was engaged in a continued wild goose chase. "We're looking for something that does exist, and that is the truth," he said. But he made clear that the original hunt for apples had now covertly mutated into a quest for oranges.

"You know I wasn't sent here to find weapons of mass destruction," Mr. Duelfer said. "I was sent out here to find the truth about Iraqi weapons of

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Iraq's Interim Government

Published: June 2, 2004

For weeks, Washington encouraged the world to believe that the United Nations was putting together Iraq's new interim government. Instead, the most critical appointments were made by the outgoing Iraqi Governing Council, an American-appointed body heavy with exile politicians that has limited public support and a dismal record of nonperformance. That messy process will now become the interim government's first burden as it tries to set up elections for a legislature and constitutional assembly early next year.

ARTICLE TOOLS



The Bush administration was genuinely, if shortsightedly, delighted with last Friday's disappointing choice of Iyad Allawi, a longtime ally of the Central Intelligence Agency, for prime minister. It was far less pleased with yesterday's naming of Sheik Ghazi al-Yawar, recently a vocal critic of American occupation policies, for the ceremonial job of president. The United Nations envoy, Lakhdar Brahimi, had strongly favored other candidates for both jobs.

READERS' OPIN

In addition to Sheik Yawar, a Sunni, one of the new government's two deputy presidents and several of the 33 cabinet members, including Dr. Allawi, a Shiite, come from the Governing Council's ranks.

TIMES NEWS TR Topics

The ability of the Governing Council to essentially seize control of the selections left Mr. Brahimi looking ineffective. That does not bode well for the U.N.'s ability to help in the next phase, the organization of the elections. The American proconsul, Paul Bremer III, gave the impression of a man reluctant to part with any of the power he has wielded for most of the past year.

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Positions in the interim government have been carefully parceled out to members of the Shiite majority Sunni and Kurdish minorities to reflect the country's ethnic and religious divisions. The odds that the country now start to heal those divisions are daunting. Yesterday's deadly bombing of a Kurdish party's offices at the American occupation headquarters underscores the pervasive insecurity and sectarian divisions.

Since it is in Iraq's best interests, and America's, that the new government succeed, it must now be endowed with much credibility and sovereignty as possible. An important early step would be to make sure that its leaders are closely involved in the final drafting of the United Nations Security Council resolution that will define the nature of Iraq's coming sovereignty.

The end of the Governing Council concludes a chapter of unpopular, ineffectual governance that failed to quell a growing insurgency and did little to lay the groundwork for a workable democracy. Although the new government body looks uncomfortably like the old one with a new name and a few added powers, it must be helped

NYT

Twin bombs greet new govt in Iraq

- *New President in sovereignty cry*
- *Allawi Cabinet takes over from Council*

Reuters & AP
Baghdad, June 1

IRAQI LEADERS today cut a face-saving deal with the US and UN on a President and a government to lead the country out of occupation on June 30. The Sunni Muslim head of the Iraqi Governing Council, Ghazi Mashal Ajil al-Yawar, was chosen President amid high drama after America's preferred candidate, former Foreign Minister Adnan Pachachi, turned down the post in the face of accusations that he was a US stooge.

Hours later, the Governing Council dissolved itself, handing its responsibilities over to Prime Minister Iyad Allawi's Cabinet, which will rule Iraq from June 30 till the elections scheduled for January 2005. Accordingly, the 36-member interim government was sworn in, a first constitutional step toward assuming full power when the US returns sovereignty on June 30.

Almost to the hour, the welcome developments after more than a year of turmoil and occupation were greeted by deadly twin blasts in Baghdad and Beiji killing 15 and injuring more than 40. In his first public remarks as President, Saudi and US-educated Yawar said he wanted the UN to grant the country "full sovereignty" in a resolution now under discussion. "We, the Iraqis, look forward to being granted full sovereignty through a Security Council resolution to enable us to rebuild a democratic and federal homeland."

The Sunni Muslim tribal, who routinely wears traditional Arab robes and headgear, was sharply critical of the occupation in a recent TV interview, blaming America's ineptness but also denouncing violence against them.

Hoshiyar Zebari, reappointed foreign minister, is heading for New York today to lobby the UN for full sovereignty. It was not clear if Zebari would ask for amendments to the draft resolution on Iraqi sovereignty proposed by the US and Britain. Last week, Yawar, as head of the Iraqi Governing Council, had criticised the

draft for giving too little control to Iraqis over US troops remaining on their soil.

Iraq is also keen to scrap all international supervision of its oil revenues imposed when Saddam Hussein was in power. The draft resolution proposes an international audit on the spending of those revenues.

Washington says its draft offers "full sovereignty" but countries including France, Russia and China — all opponents of the US invasion — have suggested it does not go far enough.

There was high drama that came with the election. Yawar was declared President amid chaotic scenes — replete with rumours, claims and counterclaims — after council members angrily accused American Governor L. Paul Bremer of trying to strong-arm the choice of Pachachi for the largely ceremonial post. An aide to Pachachi said the 81-year-old former minister was named President but immediately turned down the post.

Council member Nasser al-Chaderchi said Pachachi apologised to his colleagues for the controversy and yielded to Yawar. Ibrahim al-Jaafari of the Shia Muslim Dawa Party and Rowsch Shaways, speaker of Parliament in the Kurdish autonomous region in Arbil, have been named Vice-Presidents.

At the swearing-in ceremony inside Saddam Hussein's old clock tower the 36-member government sat on a raised platform behind the podium while a Sunni cleric chanted prayers.

Allawi, Yawar and the vice-presidents were introduced to cheers from the crowd, including US overseer Bremer. UN envoy Lakhdar Brahimi, who addressed the audience, said it had been an arduous task getting this far, lauding the outcome.



Ghazi al-Yawar



Adnan Pachachi

IRAQ'S NEW ORDER

- **President:** Ghazi al-Yawar
- **Deputy President:** Ibrahim Jaffari
- **Deputy President:** Roj Nuri Shis
- **Prime Minister:** Iyad Allawi
- **Deputy PM:** Barham Saleh
- **Foreign minister:** Hoshiyar Zebari
- **Oil minister:** Thamer Abbas Ghadban
- **Interior Minister:** Falah al-Naqib
- **Finance Minister:** Adel Abdel Mahdi
- **Defence minister:** Sheikh Hazem al-Shalan



An Iraqi woman injured in the car bomb blast outside the offices of the PUK in Baghdad.

REUTERS

Bush admits war costs were 'great'

PRESIDENT GEORGE Bush observed Memorial Day on Monday and acknowledged the "great costs" of the current conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Atop a rain-swept hill in Arlington National Cemetery, the Republican President placed a wreath at the marble tomb of unidentified soldiers killed during the two World Wars and in Korea, before bowing his head for a moment of silence.

"Through our history, America has gone to war reluctantly because we have

known the costs of war. And the war on terror we're fighting today has brought great costs of its own," Bush said.

But he said since the September 11, 2001, attacks on America, US service men and women have displayed "decency and their brave spirit".

"Because of their fierce courage, America is safer, two terror regimes are gone forever, and more than 50 million souls now live in freedom," Bush declared.

Reuters, Arlington

Blasts kill 15 in Baghdad, Beiji

Associated Press
Baghdad, June 1

BOMBS EXPLODED on Tuesday in central Baghdad and near a US military base in the northern city of Beiji killing at least 15 people.

In Baghdad, a car bomb exploded outside the offices of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, killing three people and injuring 20, the military said. It was one of several blasts heard in the capital just after reports circulated that Ghazi Mashal Ajil al-Yawar, current head of the Iraqi Governing Council, had been selected as president of the interim government set to take power June 30.

Ambulances raced to the scene near the headquarters of the US-run coalition, and US troops kept people back. TV video showed debris and a charred wall of a building.

Minutes earlier, another blast, followed by gunfire, sent a cloud 100 feet billowing into the dusty air hanging over the city. Coalition aircraft could be heard flying over Baghdad.

In Beiji, a roadside bomb exploded near the US military base, killing 12 Iraqis — including seven members of the Iraqi Civil Defence Corps — and wounding 23. Two US 1st Infantry Division soldiers were wounded and evacuated to a combat hospital, together with 16 Iraqis who were hurt.

The Beiji blast occurred around 9 am outside the gates of the 1st Infantry Division's forward operating base, Summerall, about 155 miles north of Baghdad, Capt Bill Coppernoll said.

The Baghdad blast ripped through the building in the



DIFFERENT BALL GAME: A US Marine plays soccer with an Iraqi police officer near Falujah on Monday.

AP

early afternoon, shortly after a party attended by hundreds of people. The event was intended to celebrate the founding of the PUK, which is seen as being close to the Americans.

Under the leadership of Jalal Talabani, the party represented one of the main anti-Saddam forces on Iraqi soil after the Gulf War. Fighters from the party backed American forces in last year's invasion.

Talabani, who holds a seat on the Governing Council, was not in the offices when the blast occurred, a party spokesman said.

Most of the injured were outside the offices and were struck by flying glass, said Lt. Col. Robert Campbell of the 38th Calvary Unit in the 1st Calvary Division.

US delaying talks: Iraqis

Baghdad, May 31 (Reuters): Iraqi politicians said talks scheduled for today to decide posts in a new government had been delayed by one day at America's behest and complained that Washington was meddling in the selection process.

"The Americans have asked for the meeting to be delayed until tomorrow," said Mahmoud Othman, a member of the US-appointed governing council.

Iraq's US-led authorities are due to formally hand over to an interim Iraqi government on June 30. Iyad Allawi, who has worked with the CIA against Saddam Hussein, was last week named Prime Minister.

US officials, a UN envoy and members of the governing council have been trying to agree on the composition of the new government, but council members and US officials are at odds over who should be the new President, council members say.

The Iraqis have been pushing for Ghazi Ajil al-Yawar, a civil engineer who left Iraq in 1990, while US officials want the largely ceremonial position to go to

Adnan Pachachi, a former Iraqi foreign minister.

"There's quite a lot of interference. They should let the Iraqis decide for themselves. This is an Iraqi affair," Othman said. Pachachi has said the council does not have the power to select a President.

A source close to the governing council said its members saw Yawar, a Sunni Arab in his mid-forties, as a unifying figure, who was on good terms with Iraq's main Sunni, Shia and Kurdish communities and all the council's members.

By contrast, some council members saw 81-year-old Pachachi, also a Sunni Arab, as a supporter of Arab nationalism — a doctrine that was a central plank of Saddam Hussein's ousted Baath Party, the source said. He was not on good terms with some Shia and Kurdish members of the council.

Pachachi's legitimacy was also limited because he was not seen to have played an active role in fighting Saddam's regime from abroad, the source added.

Jawad al-Boulani, an aide to council member Abdulkarim al-Muhammadawi of the Iraqi Hizbollah party, said UN envoy Lakhdar Brahimi and Paul Bremer, the top US official in Iraq, were marginalising council members in the talks and not consulting Iraqi groups outside the council.

Baghdad blast

A car bomb blew up on a busy Baghdad street today, killing four people and wounding 25, witnesses and US military officials said. The blast cut down pedestrians not far from the offices of Iraq's new Prime Minister-designate and the US administrative headquarters, but it was unclear where the bombers were heading when the car exploded on al-Kindi street.



A wounded boy cries in a Baghdad hospital after the blast. (Reuters)

JUN 2003

আলাউয়ির মনোনয়নে সাই আমেরিকার

বাগদাদ, ২৯ মে- ইরাকের পরবর্তী প্রধানমন্ত্রী পদে আইয়াদ আলাউয়ির মনোনয়নকে স্বাগত জানাল আমেরিকা। কালই মার্কিন মদতপুষ্ট গভর্নিং কাউন্সিলের বৈঠকে সর্বসম্মত ভাবে সাদ্দাম হুসেইনের বাথ পার্টির সদস্য ৫৮ বছর বয়সী আলাউয়ির নাম গৃহীত হয়। ৩০ জুন তাঁর হাতে ক্ষমতা তুলে দেবে আমেরিকার নেতৃত্বাধীন জোটবাহিনী। আলাউয়ির মনোনয়নকে স্বাগত জানিয়েছে রাষ্ট্রপুঞ্জও। রাষ্ট্রপুঞ্জের প্রধান মুখপাত্র ফ্রেড একহার্ড বলেছেন, নতুন প্রধানমন্ত্রীর সঙ্গে বনিফ-যোগাযোগ রেখে কাজ করতে তাঁরা আগ্রহী। এ দিকে, ফুফায় আজ ফের গুলির লড়াইয়ে বিদ্রোহী শিয়া নেতা মোকতাদা আল সদরের মাহদি বাহিনীর কয়েক জন সেনাকে মার্কিন সেনারা হত্যা করেছে। তবে দু'পক্ষের মধ্যে বৃহস্পতিবার যে শান্তি চুক্তি হয়েছে, তা সরাসরি বানচাল করার কথা কোনও পক্ষই বলেনি।

অন্তর্বর্তী সরকারের প্রধানমন্ত্রী পদে আলাউয়ির মনোনয়ন নিয়ে প্রাথমিক ভাবে দ্বিধা দেখলেও পরে সুর পাস্টে তাঁকে সমর্থন জানিয়েছে হোয়াইট হাউস। হাউসের মুখপাত্র স্ট ম্যাককেল্যান বলেছেন, "আলাউয়ি যে নেতা হিসাবে খুবই দক্ষ, সে ব্যাপারে সন্দেহ নেই। ইরাকের সাধারণ মানুষের একটা বড় অংশই তাঁর সমর্থক।" এর আগে অবশ্য হোয়াইট হাউস বলেছিল, ইরাকের পরবর্তী

প্রধানমন্ত্রী পদে অনেক নাম এসেছে, আলাউয়ির নাম তাদের মধ্যে একটি। গভর্নিং কাউন্সিলই যে এই নাম চূড়ান্ত করার একমাত্র অধিকারী নয়, তা-ও জানিয়ে দিয়েছিল বৃশ প্রশাসন। তবে, একদা দেশান্তরী শিয়া নেতা আলাউয়ির উপরে আমেরিকার আস্থা রাখাটা স্বাভাবিক, কেননা, সাদ্দামকে ধরার ব্যাপারে সি আই এ-কে যথেষ্ট সাহায্য করেছিলেন তিনি।

এ দিকে, প্রধানমন্ত্রী পদে আলাউয়ির নাম চূড়ান্ত হয়ে যাওয়ার পরে প্রেসিডেন্ট হিসাবে দু'জনের নাম আলোচিত হচ্ছে। এঁরা হলেন, গাজি আল-ইয়াওয়ার ও আদনান পাচাচি। গভর্নিং কাউন্সিলের কুর্দ সদস্য মাহমুদ ওতমান অবশ্য জানিয়েছেন, ইয়াওয়ারই প্রেসিডেন্ট হওয়ার সম্ভাবনা বেশি। সরকারের অন্যান্য সদস্যদের নাম চূড়ান্ত করতে এ দিন আলাউয়িও মার্কিন ও ইরাকি অফিসারদের সঙ্গে দফায় দফায় বৈঠক করেন। মার্কিন জেটের সঙ্গে তাঁদের মতৈক্যও হয়েছে বলে খবর। চূড়ান্ত তালিকা রবিবার প্রকাশিত হওয়ার সম্ভাবনা রয়েছে।

বাগদাদের আবু হাইব কারাগারে যুদ্ধবন্দিদের জেরা করতে কিউবার গুয়ানতানামো বে-র মার্কিন নৌ ঘাটি থেকে বিশেষজ্ঞদের নিয়ে যাওয়া হয়েছিল বলে নিউইয়র্ক টাইমস খবর দিয়েছে। আবু হাইবে মোতামেন মার্কিন গোয়েন্দাদের জেরার কলাকৌশল শিখিয়েছিলেন তাঁরা।

গত ডিসেম্বরে, যখন আবু হাইবে ইরাকি যুদ্ধবন্দির উপরে পাশবিকতম অত্যাচার চলছিল, তখন গুয়ানতানামো বে-র বিশেষজ্ঞেরা সেখানে হাজির ছিলেন বলে সেনা কর্তাদের উদ্ধৃত করে সংবাদপত্রটি জানিয়েছে।

আজ মধ্য বাগদাদে আমেরিকার নিয়ন্ত্রণাধীন প্রশাসনের সদর দফতরের কাছে মর্টার হামলায় চার জন আহত হয়েছেন। এঁদের মধ্যে এক জনের অবস্থা আশঙ্কাজনক। আহত চার জন আবাসন মন্ত্রকে ঢোকায় জন নিরাপত্তা টোকাতে দাঁড়িয়ে ছিলেন বলে ইরাকি পুলিশ সূত্রে জানানো হয়েছে। উত্তর ইরাকের কির্কুকে সিভিল ডিফেন্স বাহিনীর প্রধান ও তাঁর পরিবারের লোকজনকে আজ সকালে গুলি করে হত্যা করেছে আততায়ীরা। এই খবর রয়টার্সের।

কাশ্মীরে বিস্ফোভ: শ্রীনগর থেকে রশিদ আহমেদ জানাচ্ছেন, ইরাকের পবিত্র শহর নজাফে চতুর্থ খলিফা ও হজরত মহম্মদের জামাতা হজরত আলির সমাধিস্থলে মার্কিন হানাদারির প্রতিবাদে কাল কাশ্মীর উপত্যকার বিভিন্ন অঞ্চলে প্রতিবাদ মিছিল বের হয়। আমেরিকা বিরোধী দ্রোগানে মুখর শিয়া প্রতিবাদকারীরা শ্রীনগর, বাদগাম, বীরওয়া, মাগাম, কার্গিল প্রভৃতি এলাকায় বিস্ফোভ দেখান। তাঁদের অভিযোগ, শিয়া মুসলিমদের অন্যতম পবিত্র এই ধর্মস্থানে আমেরিকার এই আঘাত গোটা বিশ্বে ইসলামকে হেয় করার বড়যন্ত্রের অঙ্গ।

ইরাকে অন্তর্বর্তী সরকারের মাথায় শিয়া বিজ্ঞানীর নাম

বাগদাদ, ২৬ মে: ইরাকে ৩০ জুনের মধ্যে ক্ষমতা হস্তান্তর করতে চেয়ে রাষ্ট্রপুঞ্জের নিরাপত্তা পরিষদে প্রস্তাব পেশের পরে পরবর্তী সম্ভাব্য প্রধানমন্ত্রীর নাম জানিয়ে দিল আমেরিকা। এই পদে তাদের প্রথম পছন্দ, শিয়া গোষ্ঠীভুক্ত পরমাণু বিজ্ঞানী হুসেন আল-শাহরিস্তানি। সাদাম হুসেনের আমলে এক বছর কুখ্যাত আবু হাইব জেলে কাটানো শাহরিস্তানিও জানিয়েছেন, এই দামিষ্টি নিতে তাঁর আপত্তি নেই। তবে, তিনি বলেন, তিনি বরাবর সেবামূলক কাজের সঙ্গেই যুক্ত থাকতে চেয়েছেন। এ দিকে, ইরাকের জোট সরকারের এক অফিসার শাহরিস্তানির প্রধানমন্ত্রী হওয়ার সম্ভাবনা উড়িয়ে দিয়েছেন। ফলে, অন্তর্বর্তী সরকারের প্রধান কে হবেন, তা নিয়ে অনিশ্চয়তা কাটেনি।

ক্ষমতা হস্তান্তরের পরে আমেরিকার নেতৃত্বাধীন জোটবাহিনীর উপর অন্তর্বর্তী সরকারের কতটা নিয়ন্ত্রণ থাকবে সেই প্রশ্ন ঘিরে ধোঁয়াশাও কাটেনি। কাল ব্রিটিশ প্রধানমন্ত্রী টনি ব্লেরের জোটবাহিনীর গতিবিধির উপর ইরাকি সরকারের তেটো দেওয়ার অধিকার থাকবে

বলে জানিয়েছিলেন। কিন্তু, আমেরিকার বিদেশসচিব কলিন পাওয়েল আজ বলেছেন, সেনাবাহিনী তাঁদের নিয়ন্ত্রণেই থাকবে এবং আত্মরক্ষার প্রয়োজনে তারা যে কোনওরকম ব্যবস্থা নেবে।

সাদামের পরমাণু প্রকল্পে কাজ করতে রাজি না-হওয়ায় এক বছর আবু হাইব জেলে অবর্ণনীয় অত্যাচার সহ্য করতে হয়েছিল শাহরিস্তানিকে। ৯১ সালে জেল থেকে পালিয়ে ব্রিটেন ও কানাডায় আশ্রয় নেন তিনি। আমেরিকা তাঁকে অন্তর্বর্তী সরকারের প্রধানমন্ত্রী পদে বসাতে চাইলেও শাহরিস্তানি নিজে বলেছেন, “বিষয়টি এখনও চূড়ান্ত হয়নি। অন্তর্বর্তী সরকার গড়ার প্রক্রিয়া তদারক করতে আসা রাষ্ট্রপুঞ্জের দূত লাখদর ব্রাহমি এখনও তাঁর মতামত জানাননি।” ইরাকের শিয়াপন্থী ধর্মীয় নেতা আয়াতোল্লা আলি আল-সিস্তানির ঘনিষ্ঠ শাহরিস্তানি ধর্মনিরপেক্ষ সরকারের যে কাঠামো তৈরি হয়েছিল, তাতে এক জন প্রেসিডেন্ট ছাড়াও থাকবেন দু'জন ভাইস প্রেসিডেন্ট ও একজন প্রধানমন্ত্রী। এঁদের

বাদ দিয়ে মন্ত্রিসভার সদস্য সংখ্যা হবে ২৬। আগামী জানুয়ারি মাসে দেশে সাধারণ নির্বাচন না-হওয়া পর্যন্ত এই সরকার ক্ষমতায় থাকবে। অন্তর্বর্তী সরকার গঠনের সময় ইরাকের বিভিন্ন জাতিগোষ্ঠীর মধ্যে একটা ভারসাম্য আনার চেষ্টা চালাচ্ছে আমেরিকা। শিয়াপ্রধান দেশে এক জন শিয়াকে প্রধানমন্ত্রী করাই তাদের ইচ্ছা। প্রেসিডেন্টের পদ একজন সুন্নিতে দেওয়া হতে পারে। দু'জন ভাইস প্রেসিডেন্টের এক জন কুর্দ ও অন্য জন শিয়া হবেন। মন্ত্রিসভার অন্যান্য সদস্যদের নাম তিনি ব্রাহমির কাছে প্রস্তাব করেছেন বলে শাহরিস্তানি জানিয়েছেন। আগামী সপ্তাহেই অন্তর্বর্তী সরকারের সদস্যদের নাম ঘোষিত হওয়ার কথা।

ইরাকে ক্ষমতা হস্তান্তর পরবর্তী পরে জোটবাহিনীর কী ভূমিকা হবে, তা নিয়ে গত দু'দিনে দু'রকম কথা বলেছে আমেরিকা ও ব্রিটেন। পাওয়েলের আজকের মন্তব্যের পরে স্বাভাবিক ভাবেই প্রশ্ন উঠেছে এ নিয়ে দু'দেশের মধ্যে কোনও মতবিরোধ দেখা দিবে কি না। এমন কথা অবশ্য অস্বীকার করেছেন খোদ ব্রিটিশ

প্রধানমন্ত্রী টনি ব্লের। আজ ব্রিটিশ পার্লামেন্টে তিনি বলেছেন, “ইরাকিদের সার্বভৌমত্ব দেওয়ার পাশাপাশি আমাদের মধ্যে এটাও ঠিক হয়েছে যে, জোটবাহিনী আমেরিকার নিয়ন্ত্রণে থাকবে।” তাঁর মতে, নীতি নির্ধারণের ক্ষেত্রে ইরাকিদের পূর্ণ সার্বভৌমত্ব থাকবে। সেনা অভিযান নিয়ন্ত্রণ করবে মার্কিন কর্তৃপক্ষ।

এ দিকে, ক্ষমতা হস্তান্তরের আগের পাঁচ সপ্তাহে ইরাক রক্তাক্ত হয়ে উঠবে, ব্লেরের এই আশঙ্কাকে সত্যি প্রমাণিত করে ইরাকে হিংসা অব্যাহত। আজ বাগদাদে দু'জন রশ ও দু'জন ইরাকি বিদ্যুৎ কর্মীকে গুলি করে হত্যা করেছে জঙ্গিরা। দোরা বিদ্যুৎ কেন্দ্রে থেকে অন্যত্র যাওয়ার পথে জঙ্গিরা তাঁদের বাসের উপর হামলা চালায়। এর পর ইরাক থেকে বাকি ২৩৪ জন কর্মীকে দেশে ফিরিয়ে নিয়ে যাওয়া হবে বলে জানিয়েছে রশ সংস্থাটি। নজাফে কাল রাতভর অভিবাসন চালিয়ে মোকতাদা আল-সাদরের ঘনিষ্ঠ এক জঙ্গিকে পাকড়াও করেছে মার্কিনবাহিনী। খুত রিয়াদ আল-মুরি আল-সদরের আত্মীয় বলে জানা গিয়েছে।— রয়টার্স

Iraqis lose right to sue coalition troops

110-177
By Kamal Ahmed

LONDON, MAY 23. British and American troops are to be granted immunity from prosecution in Iraq after the crucial 30 June handover, undermining claims that the new Iraqi government will have 'full sovereignty' over the state.

Despite widespread ill-feeling about the abuse of prisoners by American forces and allegations of mistreatment by British troops, coalition forces will be protected from any legal action.

They will only be subject to the domestic law of their home countries. Military sources have said that the question of immunity was central to obtaining military agreement on a new United Nations resolution on Iraq to be published by the middle of next month.

The new resolution will lift the arms embargo against Iraq, allowing the country to rearm its 80,000-strong army in readiness for taking over the nation's security once coalition forces finally leave. "The legal situation in Iraq will be very difficult after 30 June, with some confusion over where jurisdiction lies," said one Whitehall official. "We wanted to ensure that British troops maintained the immunity they already have under Order 17."

Order 17 refers to an agreement signed by the Coalition Provisional Authority giving American and British troops protection. That will now be extended to the new multi-national force made up of British

29/5
and American forces which will remain in Iraq at the invitation of the interim government. Last night, MPs demanded that Iraqi citizens should have some form of legal redress following allegations that people had died unnecessarily during gunfights with British forces.

"How is anyone in Iraq expected to bring a case in the British courts?" said Adam Price, the Plaid Cymru (Welsh Nationalist) Member of Parliament for Carmarthen East, who has been credited with uncovering many of the claims made against British troops.

"It is taking the idea of diplomatic immunity and applying it to 130,000 troops. There is a danger that you are actually going from immunity to being able to act with impunity." Mr. Price said that there should be a military ombudsman based in Iraq who could investigate any allegations against coalition troops and call for further action. The British army was facing fresh embarrassment yesterday when the Attorney General, Lord Goldsmith, published a statement admitting that allegations against a British soldier now facing possible criminal proceedings over the death of an Iraqi civilian during an arrest were initially dismissed by the forces.

The Crown Prosecution Service is considering pressing criminal charges against the soldier over the same incident. "The case currently under consideration by the CPS was referred to the Attorney General after charges were dismissed by the sol-

dier's commanding officer," Mr. Goldsmith said. "In these circumstances, the case cannot be tried by court martial."

Earlier this month, the British Defence Secretary, Geoff Hoon, said all allegations of mistreatment by British troops were thoroughly investigated by the Royal Military Police Special Investigations Branch.

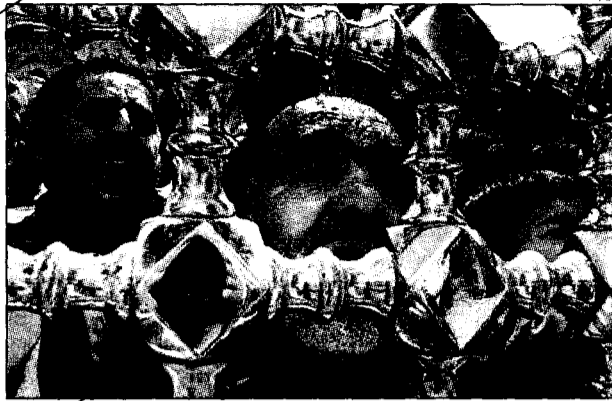
The soldier's case is one of the two which he said had now reached 'an advanced stage with decisions on prosecutions pending'. The first picture of how the new Iraq will look after the handover is now starting to emerge. Senior diplomatic sources said the new U.N. resolution, which will give a legal basis to the Iraqi interim government, will be published in the middle of next month.

It is likely to say that this government should be able to give 'strategic direction' to the multinational force although it will not take over full command, a move that has already been rejected by the American and British armies. Iraq's new ministers will also take control of the prisons, including the notorious Abu Ghraib jail where Americans have been photographed and videotaped abusing prisoners. It will also be allowed to equip its army, run a police force and all of the departments of state. "We will give full sovereignty back," said one source closely involved in the negotiations. There must be a partnership between the Iraqi government and the multinational force. There can't be subservience."

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THE HINDU

24 MAY 2004



Anguished Iraqis peer through the silver fence of the holy shrine at Najaf after it was hit by a bomb on Tuesday

Officer for Abu Ghraib prison suspended

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Washington: The US army has suspended its general in charge of guards at the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq, four months after abuses of detainees were discovered to have taken place there. Brigadier General Janis L Karpinski, who is currently on leave in the US, was indefinitely relieved of her command pending the outcome of the probe into treatment of prisoners at the Iraqi prison but American army officials said the move should not be taken as punishment.

Army spokesperson Colonel Pamela Hart confirmed the suspension and said Karpinski would be transferred to another army reserve unit. Another officer will be named to take her command position temporarily, a media report said.

Karpinski, however, maintained that she was aware of

the decision but had not yet received written notice of her suspension.

She said she was angry because she felt she had done nothing wrong and "I intend to fight it. I am not backing down from this," she told the 'Washington Post' newspaper.

"I suspect that they want to make a statement that all the officers who have been involved in Abu Ghraib have been suspended," she said. "I'm angry because it just seems consistent with the rest of this unfairness. This is such a gross miscarriage of justice."

Karpinski and other officers in her brigade were faulted by US army investigators for paying little attention to the prison's day-to-day operations and not taking action to discipline soldiers under their command. Agencies

Top US commander in Iraq to be replaced

Washington: The Pentagon is seeking a replacement for Lieutenant General Ricardo Sanchez, the top US commander in Iraq, a senior US defence official said noting the general already has been there for 13 months.

The official said on Monday that the move to replace the general had no connection to the Abu Ghraib prisoner abuse scandal. "Absolutely not," the official said, when asked

whether the prison scandal was the motive. "He's been there 13 months," he said. "You have to be looking for a replacement for him like you do for every other soldier."

Speculation on Sanchez's replacement has centered on General George Casey, vice chief of the army, and Lieutenant General Bantz Craddock, currently senior military assistant of defence secretary Donald Rumsfeld. AFP

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ARTICLE TOO

U.S. and Britain Propose Outline for June 30 Transfer of Power in Iraq

By WARREN HOGE

Published: May 25, 2004

UNITED NATIONS, May 24 — The United States and Britain introduced a draft Security Council resolution on Monday that pledged a transfer of power to an interim government in Iraq on June 30 but left open to further negotiation the authority and duration of the American-led multinational force remaining in the country.

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The draft resolution would give that force broad authority "to take all necessary measures to contribute to the maintenance of security and stability in Iraq, including by preventing and deterring terrorism."

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But, while it calls for "close coordination" between Iraq's new government and the foreign troops, it does not set a date for their withdrawal or explicitly empower Iraqis to order their departure.

TIMES NEWS Topics

The resolution, aimed at gaining international support for the political transition in Iraq, backed the current effort of the United Nations envoy, Lakhdar Brahimi, to appoint the caretaker government and endorsed a timetable of United Nations-planned direct elections for a national assembly by the end of January.

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Ambassadors from the 15-nation Security Council, which split bitterly last year over the American and British decision to go to war, greeted the proposal on Monday with general

approval, despite misgivings over the security arrangements.

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Gunter Pleuger, the ambassador from Germany, whose country opposed the war in tense and fractious deliberations last year, called the draft text "a good basis for discussions." He said the final resolution would "make clear that we have a new start in Iraq."

"I don't see major disagreements, although there are points to be refined," said Ambassador Heraldo Muñoz of Chile. "There are differences, but at the same time I have seen progress and growing agreement."

Diplomats said that they hoped for a vote on the final resolution early in June, but that a vote that soon seemed overly optimistic with the many imponderables on the central security issue in the draft circulated Monday.

Much of the timing depends on when Mr. Brahimi makes his choices and returns to New York to present them to the Council. He has been directed to pick a president, two vice presidents, a prime minister and 26 members of a cabinet by the end of this month, but he may not make that deadline.

A number of Security Council diplomats said they were disappointed by the draft resolution's determination that the contentious issues of how detainees will be handled and what will be the relationship between the new Iraqi government and the multinational force will be detailed only in an exchange of letters next month between the force, the United Nations and the members of the new government. That step cannot be taken until those members are chosen by Mr. Brahimi.

A senior United States diplomat said a majority of questions at the closed session had focused on this issue and that the Americans had responded that they were waiting for the new interim government to be set up so that Iraqis themselves would have the final say on security and other crucial matters.

"It's our thinking that the Security Council shouldn't be dictating to a sovereign Iraq all the things it should do," he said. "A lot of this stuff is to be worked out among the Iraqis."

Other questions, he said, dealt with "how we could improve presentation and how to make clear that there really is going to be a switch."

"They've put down markers," he said of the Security Council ambassadors, "and we will have to wait some time to see if we can address all the issues they raised. Some of them come out of the Iraqi process, so we don't know the answers yet."

The language of the resolution calls for a multinational force "under unified command" whose "mandate" would be subject to "review" within 12 months or by request before then by the government that will assume power after elections in January.

France, Germany and several other Security Council countries have made it clear that they want a more precise date to reconsider the force and more direct language entitling Iraqis to order the departure of foreign troops.



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The draft also calls for a distinct force within the multinational force to guard United Nations staff members and property, a plan the United States hopes would attract troops from governments less interested in joining the overall force. An American diplomat estimated the size of the unit as up to 2,000 soldiers, and he said three countries not now represented in Iraq had expressed interest.

The resolution also called for adopting one of Mr. Brahimi's principal suggestions — a national conference in the months after transition to appoint a consultative council to advise the interim government.

Mr. Brahimi supervised two such gatherings, called *loya jirgas*, in Kabul in 2002 and 2003 when he was the United Nations' chief envoy to Afghanistan.

The resolution would also give Iraq control over the Development Fund for Iraq, the depository of all of Iraq's oil revenues, which had been under the purview of the Coalition Provisional Authority. An international auditing board intended to guard against corruption would remain in place.

The senior American diplomat said he did not believe that there would end up being a dispute over security.

"We perceive that a sovereign Iraqi government will not engage in military action that they don't wish to engage in," he said. The resolution, he said, "puts the permanence" of the multinational force "clearly in Iraqi hands."

He said he sensed none of the anger on the Security Council that he had last year. "My sense is that all members of the Council want to get to a sovereign Iraq as quickly as we can and want to find a Security Council resolution that will help that happen," he said.

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Wedding video cloud on US

Baghdad, May 24 (Reuters): New video footage showing Iraqis celebrating a desert wedding raised more questions today about a US air strike last week that killed about 40 people.

The US military insisted most of the dead were foreign guerrilla fighters who had slipped over the nearby Syrian border. Local people say the Americans massacred wedding guests.

Associated Press Television News said it had obtained the footage from a survivor of the strike early on May 19.

A Baghdad musician, a drummer who said he was the only survivor of the 10-man band which played at the party, told Reuters the film was shot on Monday, May 17 — the second of three days of wedding celebrations which ended with the attack.

The film shows pick-up trucks racing across the desert — some of the dead came from the regional capital Ramadi — men dancing in a tent, children larking about and a musician playing an electric organ. The same man later appeared dead in a shroud.

Basem Ishaq Mohamed, the drummer, identified the organist as Mohaned, brother of a noted Baghdad wedding singer Hussein al-Ali, who also performed at the wedding. Both were killed when US aircraft struck in the early hours of Wednesday, he said.

Mohamed was speaking at the singer's family home, where relatives including Hussein's daughter were poring over photos of the brothers. They were buried in Baghdad on Thursday.

Mohamed and other witnesses said festivities ended on Tues-

day at about 1830 GMT when they said US military aircraft began circling overhead.

They surveyed the area for four hours before the deadly strike at about 3 am. "I was terrified. It was like a nightmare," he said. He escaped from a tent where he and the other male wedding guests had been asleep and crawled hundreds of metres on his stomach until he reached a nearby house.

He returned in the morning to find more than 40 dead, including women, children and his fellow musicians.

Mohamed dismissed the US suggestion that the target had been a safehouse for foreign fighters. "The people raised livestock and crops and nothing else," he said. At a hospital in Ramadi, where many of the dead and injured were taken, survivors were united by their anger at the US attack.

Standing over three-year-old Kholoud al-Muhammed, who held a cookie in her hand, Mamdouh Harajee listed off the names of the dead from a complex web of relatives who attended the wedding.

"She lost her mother and father. Another family of eight lost six members. Another family lost four," he said. "It was just a wedding."

The father of the groom, who as a Muslim is allowed to take up to four wives, brought his three wives and some of their children to the wedding.

Two of the wives were killed and the third, Halima Shihaab, lay wounded in her hospital bed delirious with pain killers, calling out the names of her sons.

The top UN human rights official, Bertrand Ramcharan, has said even if some of those at the house in Mogr al-Deeb were involved in criminal activity, that was no excuse for "carnage".

US Brigadier General Mark Kimmitt said today some kind of celebration could have been going on during the day but after midnight "the activities that we saw happening on the ground were somewhat inconsistent with a wedding party."

The White House today brushed aside charges by retired Marine General Anthony Zinni, former chief of US Central Command, that US policies in Iraq have been a failure.

New UN decree endorses Iraq sovereignty

Bush administration attempting to assure UN Security Council members they would not be asked to approve an occupation under another name.

British ambassador Emyr Jones Parry said the resolution "underlines clearly that all sovereignty will be returned to the Iraqis, that the interim Iraqi government will assume total responsibility for its own sovereignty."

and says that government would "assume the responsibility and authority for governing a sovereign Iraq."

The draft emerged as President George W. Bush prepared a televised speech mapping out his plans for Iraq, where violent attacks on occupying forces have dimmed US hopes for a peaceful transfer to democratic rule.

The definition of sovereignty is a contentious issue, with the

United Nations, May 24 (Reuters): A new US-British drafted UN Security Council resolution endorsing sovereignty for an Iraqi caretaker government approves the presence of the US-led force there but sets no date for the troops to leave.

The resolution, distributed to council members today, would endorse the formation of a "sovereign interim government" that would take office by June 30

Parting ways ✓

526 Chalabi falls out with patrons 3915

American disarray in Iraq is evident in the trouble it is having with one of its staunchest allies, the man who was billed in some quarters to be Iraq's Hamid Karzai. American troops and Iraqi police have raided homes and offices of Ahmed Chalabi, leader of the Iraqi National Congress (INC) and member of US-appointed Iraqi governing council. Payments from the Pentagon to the INC, amounting to \$340,000 a month, have also been cut off. This smooth wheeler-dealer, who has been convicted of bank fraud in Jordan, symbolises in many ways what is wrong with the US invasion of Iraq. ~~was wrong~~

It is his men who passed on fake intelligence to Washington about Saddam Hussein's weapons of mass destruction, as well as ideas that American troops would be greeted as liberators when they landed in Iraq. But it isn't as if US intelligence doesn't have its own means of cross-checking information; the CIA had been dubious about him all through. Rather, his message was one that influential neo-conservatives wanted to hear as it fitted in with their war plans, and the disastrous invasion of Iraq happened.

But Chalabi may well have realised which way the political winds are blowing now in Iraq, and he has recently been building contacts with the Iranians, high on America's "axis of evil" list. This has probably enraged the Americans, rather than unsavoury activities by his men such as stealing cars and asking for bribes from companies bidding for Iraqi contracts. Such activities are routine among America's allies in West Asia. In the ugly snakepit that Iraqi politics has become, Chalabi may have concluded that America's day in Iraq was over; they responded by casting him out to the nether depths. There are reports that the Americans have been stripping his bodyguards of weapons. As he has been arguing strenuously, former Ba'athists should be purged from all levels of administration, a decision responsible in no small measure for the chaos in Iraq, his assassination by Ba'athist rebels is now a distinct possibility.

THE STATESMAN

24 MAY 2008

Abuse was meant as punishment

SCOTT HIGHAM & JOE STEPHENS
WASHINGTON | MAY 22

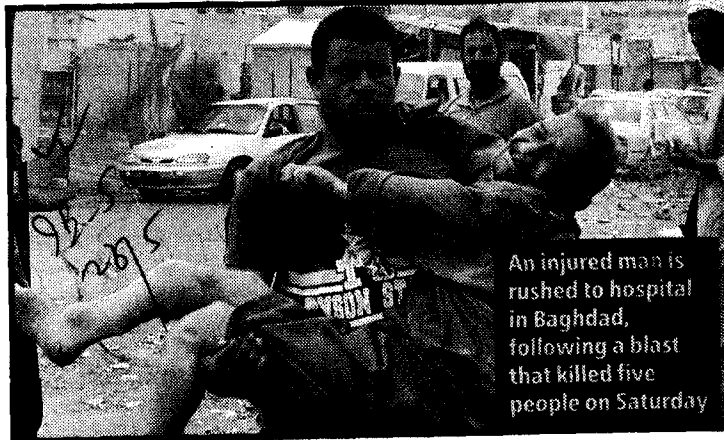
PRISONERS posed in three of the most infamous photographs of abuse to come out of the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq were not being softened up for interrogation by intelligence officers but instead were being punished for criminal acts or the amusement of their jailers, according to previously secret documents obtained by *The Washington Post*.

Several photographs taken by MPs on the cellblock have become iconic, among them the naked human pyramid, the hooded man standing on a box hooked up to wires, and the three naked prisoners handcuffed together on the prison floor. The documents show that MPs staged the photographs to discipline the prisoners for acts ranging from rioting to an alleged rape of a teen-age boy in the prison.

The documents, which include statements by four of the seven MPs now charged in the abuse scandal, provide several new insights into the unfolding case. For instance, they contain tantalising hints about the role of military intelligence operating in the shadows of Tier 1A at the prison. One military police officer said that civilian and military intelligence officers frequently visited Tier 1A at night, spiriting detainees away for questioning. The documents offer the first account of how the scandal unraveled.

MPs provided the statements to investigators in January and February. Spec. Sabrina D. Harman, Spec. Jeremy C. Sivits, Sgt. Javal S. Davis, and Pfc. Lynndie R. England gave statements to investigators after the prisoner abuse was reported by another soldier in their MP company, Spec. Joseph M. Darby.

The abuse case began to unfold when Darby returned to Abu Ghraib from leave in November and heard about a shooting at the prison's "hard site," he told military investigators. He said he asked the MP in charge of the tier's night shift, Spec. Charles A. Graner Jr., if he had any photographs of the cell



An injured man is rushed to hospital in Baghdad, following a blast that killed five people on Saturday

MEANWHILE

UN envoy Lakhdar Brahimi could reveal a list of people for the future interim Iraqi government in two weeks, US Secretary of State Colin Powell has said.

Iraqi politician Ahmed Chalabi faced accusations on Saturday that he passed classified US intelligence to Iran as the US faced strong criticism from the Iraqi Governing Council over a raid on Chalabi's home.

Hundreds of Iraqi prisoners were released from Abu Ghraib here on Saturday. Some 13 buses filled with Iraqis left the gates of the notorious prison, where thousands of political prisoners were executed under President Saddam Hussein,

as part of a scheduled release of 472 prisoners.

A car bomb exploded on Saturday in front of the home of an Iraqi Deputy Interior Minister, injuring him and killing at least five people, including four policemen. Abdul-Jabbar Youssef Al-Sheikhli, the Deputy Minister in charge of security, was slightly injured in the forehead and right arm, said Hassan Hadi, Health Ministry official. "I expect he will leave the hospital in a short time," he said.

A US soldier, Staff Sgt. Camilo Mejia, who said he saw prisoners being abused in Iraq was convicted of desertion on Friday for failing to return to his unit after taking leave to the US last year.

— Agencies

where the shooting took place. Darby said Graner handed him two CDs of photographs. "I thought the discs just had pictures of Iraq, the cell where the shooting occurred," Darby told investigators.

Instead, Darby viewed hundreds of photographs showing naked detainees being abused by US soldiers. "It was just wrong," Darby said. "I knew I had to do something." He said he asked Graner, a Pennsylvania prison guard in civilian life, about the photographs. Graner replied: "The Christian in me says it's wrong, but the corrections officer in me says, 'I love to make a grown

man piss himself.'"

In the newly obtained documents, the MPs who gave statements describe Graner and Frederick as the leaders and organisers of the abuse. Frederick was the enlisted man in charge of Tier 1A. Attorneys for the charged MPs said their clients were acting at the behest of military intelligence officers at the prison to soften up the detainees for interrogation sessions.

Davis said the intelligence officers told Graner and Frederick: "Loosen this guy up for us. Make sure he has a bad night. Make sure he gets the treatment." "What is the

'Dogs to intimidate prisoners was OK'

DOUGLAS JEHL & ERIC SCHMITT
WASHINGTON | MAY 22

THE use of dogs to intimidate prisoners during interrogation at Abu Ghraib in Iraq was approved by military intelligence officers at the prison, and was one of several aggressive tactics they adopted, even without approval from senior military commanders, according to interviews gathered by Army investigators.

The documents assembled by Army investigators and obtained by *The New York Times* cite accounts by US dog handlers who say use of military working dogs in interrogations at Abu Ghraib was

approved by Col. Thomas M. Pappas, commander of the 205th Military Intelligence Brigade. Previously, Pentagon and Army officials have said only the top US commander, Lt. Gen. Ricardo S. Sanchez, could have approved the use of the animals for interrogations.

At least two non-commissioned officers, Sgts. Michael J. Smith and Santos A. Cardona, said they used unmuzzled military dogs to intimidate prisoners. They said they were acting under instructions from Pappas, the commander of the intelligence brigade.

Both sergeants said Pappas had assured that the use of dogs in interrogation was permitted and did not require written authorisation. The memorandum for the record issued by the interrogation centre on Oct. 9 listed the "presence of working dogs" as "approved" on basis of authorisation from the interrogation officer.

—NYT



Reuters

name of the MI staff member who made the previously stated comments?" investigators asked. "I don't know the name as they often don't wear uniforms, and if they do they don't have name tapes," Davis said.

Several of the worst photographed abuses took place on a single day, November 8. In one of the most striking images to surface, a detainee jokingly referred to as "Gilligan" by the MPs was forced to stand on a box of food, with wires connected to his figures, toes and penis. Harman said she attached the wires to "Gilligan" and told him he would be electrocuted if he fell

off the box. "Why did you do this to the detainee 'Gilligan'?" a military investigator asked. "Just playing with him," Harman said.

Also that day, MPs punished seven detainees they said were instigating a riot in a part of the prison outside Tier 1A. The detainees were stripped and forced to the floor. "Graner was placing them into position," Harman told investigators. "How long did the human pyramid last?" an investigator asked her. "The pyramid lasted about 15 to 20 minutes," she said. Sivits said Davis jumped onto the pile of naked men. —LAT-WP

Female soldiers fondled inmates

WV 17 22/5

AFP/AP
Washington/Baghdad,
May 21

SOME PRISONERS at the Abu Ghraib prison were ridden like animals, fondled by female soldiers, forced to curse their religion and required to retrieve their food from toilets, according to a published report on Friday.

The *Washington Post*, in its Friday editions, also published new photographs and shots from a video of the alleged abuse and sexual humiliation of Iraq prisoners by US soldiers.

The newspaper said the material, including secret sworn statements from prisoners, came from evidence being assembled from investigations into possible criminal charges against US soldiers. The photographs depict a US soldier apparently preparing to strike a shackled detainee, a hooded inmate collapsed with his wrists handcuffed to the railing and a baton-wielding soldier appearing to order a naked detainee covered in a brown substance to walk a straight line, though his ankles are shackled.

The *Post* said it obtained hundreds of more pictures and several digital videos of the abuse. In one photo, a cornered inmate is cowering as a soldier tries to restrain a large black dog with both hands. In another, a soldier appears to be kneeling on naked detainees.

In secret testimony to military investigators in mid-January, detainees said they were beaten and humiliated by American soldiers working the night shift at Tier 1A in Abu Ghraib during Ramadan, according to the *Post*.

The *Post* also said detainees told investigators they were forced to denounce Islam or force-fed pork or liquor, required to masturbate in front of female soldiers, threatened with rape, and made to walk on all their hands and knees and bark like dogs. "They said we'll make you wish to die and it won't happen", the newspaper quoted a detainee as saying.

Chalabi cuts ties

TOP IRAQI politician Ahmed Chalabi's decision to cut ties with the coalition stirred fresh controversy on Friday. The interim Gover-



REUTERS

NAKED TRUTH: One of the hundreds of photos in the possession of *Washington Post*. A naked Iraqi, cuffed at the ankles and covered with an unknown substance, faces a baton-wielding US soldier at Abu Ghraib prison outside Baghdad.

ning Council was to meet on Friday to discuss its response to the US-backed raid on Chalabi's home, which led the one-time Pentagon protege to sever his ties with the Coalition Provisional Authority.

Documents, computers, personal belongings and weapons were seized during the raid.

US Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld has, meanwhile, said he believes the raids were the handiwork of the Iraqi leadership.

Chalabi's claims that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction are still unsubstantiated. The Pentagon has said it halted monthly payments of \$340,000 to Chalabi's party and would

seek other intelligence sources on Iraq.

Meanwhile, the US military said it was investigating Wednesday's death of 41 people in an air strike in western Iraq. Fighting in the holy cities of central Iraq left 10 Iraqis dead, including an employee of Al-Jazeera television who was killed in Karbala.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

22 MAY 2004

Wedding that turned into a mass funeral

By Rory McCarthy

RAMADI (IRAQ) MAY 21. The wedding feast was finished and the women had just led the young bride and groom away to their marriage tent for the night when Haleema Shihab heard the first sounds of the fighter jets screeching through the sky above.

It was 10.30 p.m. in the remote village of Mukaradeeb by the Syrian border and the guests hurried back to their homes as the party ended. As sister-in-law of the groom, Ms Shihab (30), was to sleep along with her husband and children in the house of the wedding party, the Rakat family villa. She was one of the few in the house who survived the night.

"The bombing started at 3 a.m.," she said yesterday from her bed in the emergency ward at Ramadi general hospital, 80 km west of Baghdad. "We went out of the house and the American soldiers started to shoot us. They were shooting low on the ground and targeting us one by one," she said. She ran with her youngest child in her arms and her two young boys, Ali and Hamza, close behind. As she crossed the fields a shell exploded close to her, fracturing her legs and knocking her to the floor.

She lay on the ground and a second round hit her on the right arm. By then her two boys lay dead. "I left them because they were dead," she said. One, she saw, had been decapitated by a shell.

"I fell into the mud and an American soldier came and kicked me. I pretended to be dead so he wouldn't kill me. My youngest child was alive next to me.

Ms Shihab's description, backed by other witnesses, of an attack on a sleeping village is at odds with the American claim that they came under fire while targeting a suspected foreign fighter safe house.

She described how in the hours before dawn she watched as American troops destroyed the Rakat villa and the house next door, reducing the buildings to rubble.

Another relative carried Ms Shihab and her surviving child to hospital. There she was told her husband Mohammad, the eldest of the Rakat sons, had also died.

As Ms Shihab spoke she gestured with hands still daubed red-brown with the henna the women had used to decorate themselves for the wedding.

Alongside her in the ward yesterday were three badly injured girls from the Rakat family: Khalood Mohammad, aged just a year and struggling for breath,

Moaza Rakat (12), and Iqbal Rakat (15), whose right foot doctors had already amputated.

By the time the sun rose on Wednesday over the Rakat family house, the raid had claimed 42 lives, according to Hamdi Noor al-Alusi, manager of the al-Qaim general hospital, the nearest to the village.

Among the dead were 27 members of the extended Rakat family, their wedding guests and even the band of musicians hired to play at the ceremony, among them Hussein al-Ali from Ramadi, one of the most popular singers in western Iraq.

The U.S. military admitted there had been a raid on the village at 3 a.m. on Wednesday but said it had targeted a "suspected foreign fighter safe house".

From the mosques of Ramadi volunteers had been called to dig at the graveyard of the tribe, on the southern outskirts of the city. There lay 27 graves: mounds of dirt each marked with a single square of crudely cut marble, a name scribbled in black paint.

Some gave more than one name, and one, belonging to a woman Hamda Suleman, the briefest of explanations: "The American bombing." — ©Guardian Newspapers Limited 2004

THE HINDU 22 MAY 2004

Rumsfeld blames Iraqis for Chalabi raids

Press Trust of India

Iranian stooge? SI

WASHINGTON, May 21. — US Defence Secretary Mr Donald Rumsfeld has said he believed the raids on Mr Chalabi's house and offices yesterday were the handiwork of the Iraqi leadership.

"I certainly was not aware that there was going to be a raid on a home if, in fact, there was. My understanding is that the Iraqis are involved in this, and I think you'd probably best ask the Iraqi leadership," he said yesterday.

Mr Rumsfeld faced sharp questioning at the Capitol both from Senator John Warner, Chairman of the Senate Armed Services Com-

WASHINGTON, May 21. — Mr Ahmed Chalabi was passing classified US intelligence on to Iran, CBS TV reported, citing US officials. Mr Chalabi personally handed Iranian intelligence officials sensitive information that could "get Americans killed", the network said yesterday, noting that the evidence against him was said to be "rock solid". A Chalabi aide, however, dismissed the accusations as "nonsense" and said they were part of a strategy by the CIA to discredit the Iraqi politician. — AFP

mittee, and from the media over the raid to seize some papers from the residence of Mr Chalabi, who

once enjoyed a close relationship with Pentagon and received US funding, in Baghdad.

Earlier, the White House also attributed the raid to a decision of the Iraqis.

Council condemnation

The Iraqi Governing Council today condemned the raids of the home and offices of Mr Ahmed Chalabi, adds AP. Council member Mr Mahmud Othman said the council adopted a statement that also criticized the US-led coalition for not giving the council advance notice of yesterday's raids, and what he said was the rough behaviour of Iraqi police during the raids.

THE STATESMAN

22 May 2004

চালাবির বাড়ি, দফতরে তল্লাশি মার্কিন সেনার

বাগদাদ, ২১ মে: সাদ্দাম জমানার অবসানের পরে যাকে ইরাকে অসামরিক প্রশাসনের সম্ভাব্য প্রধান হিসাবে ভাবা হচ্ছিল, সেই আহমদ চালাবির বাড়ি ও দলীয় দফতরে তল্লাশি চালিয়েছে মার্কিন সেনা এবং ইরাকি পুলিশ। সরকারি গাড়ি চুরির দায়ে অভিযুক্ত কয়েক জনকে ধরার জন্য ওই তল্লাশি চালানো হয়েছিল বলে জানিয়েছেন ইরাকি বিচারপতি হাসান মুয়াখিন। তবে মার্কিন টি ভি চ্যানেল সি বি এস জানিয়েছে, চালাবি আমেরিকার বেশ কিছু স্পর্শকাতর গোয়েন্দা-তথ্য ইরানে পাচার করেছিলেন। ইরাকের হাতে ক্ষমতা হস্তান্তর করার ঘোষিত দিন যখন এগিয়ে আসছে, সেই সময়েই এই ঘটনায় ফের বিতর্ক সৃষ্টি হয়েছে।

এ দিকে, কারবালায় শিয়া বাহিনী মাহদি সেনার উপরে মার্কিন সেনা গুলিবর্ষণ করায় বেশ কিছু হতাহতের খবর পাওয়া গিয়েছে। আরবি টি ভি চ্যানেল আল জা জিরা জানিয়েছে, কারবালায় শিয়া নেতা মোকতাদা আল-সদরের অনুগত বাহিনীর সঙ্গে মার্কিন সেনার সংঘর্ষে তাদের এক সাংবাদিক প্রাণ হারিয়েছেন। রশিদ হামিদ ওয়ালি নামে ওই সাংবাদিক সংঘর্ষেরই ছবি তুলছিলেন।

মাহদি সেনার উপরে মার্কিন বাহিনীর



বাগদাদের আবু গ্রাইব জেলে ইরাকি বন্দিদের উপর মার্কিন সেনাদের অত্যাচারের আরও এক গুচ্ছ ছবি বেরিয়েছে। তারই একটিতে এখানে একজন ইরাকি বন্দিকে নগ্ন, পায়ে বেড়ি পরানো অবস্থায় দাঁড়িয়ে থাকতে দেখা যাচ্ছে। তার সামনে দাঁড়িয়ে মার্কিন প্রহরী, হাতে ব্যাটন। বন্দির গায়ে অজানা কোনও তরল পদার্থের প্রলেপ লাগানো হয়েছে। — রয়টার্স (ওয়াশিংটন পোস্ট)

গুলিবর্ষণ সত্ত্বেও শিয়া নেতা আল-সদর নজাফে তাঁর আস্তানা থেকে বেরিয়ে অনুগামীদের উদ্দেশে বক্তৃতা দিয়েছেন। শহরের বাইরের জমায়েতে তিনি মার্কিনদের বিরুদ্ধে সংগ্রাম চালিয়ে যাওয়ার পরামর্শই দিয়েছেন।

তল্লাশির ঘটনায় ক্ষুব্ধ ইরাকি ন্যাশনাল কংগ্রেসের (আই এন সি) নেতা চালাবি অভিযোগ করেছেন, ইরাকিদের হাতে আরও ক্ষমতা চাওয়ায় তাঁকে মার্কিন হয়রানির শিকার হতে হচ্ছে। তবে ইরাকি গভর্নিং কাউন্সিলের সদস্য চালাবির বাড়ি ও দলীয় দফতরে সেনা ও পুলিশি অভিযান নিয়ে যথেষ্ট ধোঁয়াশা রয়েছে। ইরানে চালাবির পাচার করা তথ্য মার্কিনদের মৃত্যুও ঘটতে পারত বলে জানিয়েছে সি বি এস। কিন্তু তারা কোনও সূত্র উদ্ধৃত করেনি।

অন্য দিকে, ইরাকের জেলে কয়েদিদের উপরে মার্কিন সেনার অত্যাচারের আরও ছবি প্রকাশ করেছে একটি মার্কিন সংবাদপত্র। নির্বাচনী প্রচারে ইরাকে ক্ষমতা হস্তান্তরের প্রসঙ্গ তুলছেন মার্কিন প্রেসিডেন্ট জর্জ বুশ। কিন্তু উত্তরোত্তর এই ধরনের ছবি আমেরিকার সংবাদমাধ্যমেই প্রকাশিত হতে থাকায় তাঁর অস্বস্তি বাড়ছে। — রয়টার্স

New prison abuse pictures surface

Associated Press & AFP
Cairo, May 20

AN ARAB television station showed two photographs of US soldiers smiling and flashing a thumbs up as they posed next to a corpse in a body bag, saying on Thursday's broadcast that they were new pictures of abuse at Abu Ghraib prison. Al-Arabiya said the photos "surfaced during the investigation" and did not say how it obtained them. The US television network ABC had broadcast the same photos on Wednesday and identified the soldiers as two specialists who are facing charges in the Abu Ghraib abuse scandal, Sabrina Harman and Charles Graner Jr. ABC identified the dead Iraqi as Manadel al-Jamadi.

According to testimony obtained by ABC News from Spc Jason Kenner — a soldier not accused of any wrongdoing — al-Jamadi was brought to the prison by US Navy Seals in good health. Kenner said he saw extensive bruising on the man's body when he was brought out of the showers dead.

He reportedly told investigators that there was then a "battle" between CIA and military interrogators over who should dispose of the body.

The US Department of Justice has begun an investigation into the death following a referral from the CIA.

The new photographs were not as graphic as widely seen images of US soldiers sexually humiliating and otherwise abusing prisoners at Abu Ghraib. But the new photographs, particularly because they could be portrayed as showing Americans gloating over the death of an Arab, nonetheless were likely to spark more condemnation of the United States by Arabs already outraged by the prison abuse scandal and, more generally, by what they see as Washington's anti-Arab policies in West Asia.

In the first court-martial linked to the case, Spc Jeremy C.



A recently released picture shows Army Spc Sabrina Harman of the 372nd Military Police Company posing with the body of a Iraqi man in Abu Ghraib prison in Baghdad.

Sivits pleaded guilty on Wednesday to four counts of abuse of Iraqis and was sentenced to the maximum penalty of one year in prison, reduction in rank and a bad conduct discharge. But Arabs questioned the fairness of the legal proceedings in Baghdad and said Sivits should have received a harsher sentence.

Earlier this month, US Defence Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld told members of Congress that the Iraq prison abuse scandal could worsen with the release of more images of brutality.

During a Senate Armed Services Committee hearing on Abu Ghraib in Washington on Wednesday, committee chairman Sen John Warner, a Virginia Republican, said the Pentagon had found a disk containing 24 photos of abuse at Abu Ghraib.

Assistant Defence Secretary Powell A. Moore told Warner in a letter to Warner that 13 of the photos appear to have been already shown on international television and that the other 11 "may not be original or true photographs".

Photographs of US soldiers posing before naked, hooded and handcuffed Iraqi prisoners at Abu Ghraib have made the round of international media since last month. Hundreds more have been shown only to US lawmakers and kept by the Pentagon as evidence in upcoming court-martial. Thirteen of the pictures on the disc "appear to be images already seen on international television media", the Pentagon said in its letter, adding that it was not clear whether the images were genuine or fakes.

Musicians among dead in Iraqi wedding attack

Reuters
Baghdad, May 20

AN IRAQI wedding singer and his musician brother were among dozens killed by US aircraft in an attack on a wedding party, Iraqis said as the two men were buried on Thursday.

The US military says it attacked "a suspected foreign fighter safe house" near the Syrian border in the early hours of Wednesday, killing about 40 people, but denies killing civilians.

A cousin of Hussein al-Ali, a well-known singer from Baghdad, said Ali and his musician brother Mohaned had been killed while they were sleeping after performing at the wedding.

"America is the enemy of God," mourners chanted as they carried the two men's coffins in their funeral procession in the capital. Some fired guns into the air and others hoisted the Saddam Hussein-era Iraqi flag above their heads.

The brothers' bodies had first been brought from the site of the incident near Qaim to the regional capital Ramadi, in the desert 110 km west of Baghdad.

At Ramadi, a man named Sabri Mukhlis said he had driven the bodies of eight people killed and had seen 35 other corpses at the site of what he said was a US air strike.

"They hit them after the wedding party," he said.

Kerry vows troops pullout

Democrat John Kerry promised that, if elected president of the United States, he would pull virtually all American combat troops out of Iraq — away from the "death zone" — by the end of his first term.

In an interview on Wednesday, he criticised President George W. Bush for damaging relations with allies. There is so much strain in those relationships now, he said, that only a new president can repair them.

"Every president of the last century, Republican and Democrat alike, worked differently from this administration, reached out to other countries and worked with greater respect through international structures," Kerry said.

US TROOPS, IRAQI POLICE RAID POLITICIAN'S HOUSE AND OFFICES; SEVERAL HELD

Chalabi severs ties with coalition

Agencies

BAGHDAD, May 20. — Iraqi Governing Council member Mr Ahmed Chalabi today said his relations with the US-led Coalition Provisional Authority were "non-existent" after an overnight raid against his house.

US soldiers and Iraqi police arrested several people in raids on the residence of the Iraqi politician and two of his offices today, and aides accused the Americans of trying to pressure him to stop complaining about US plans for Iraq after sovereignty is transferred at the end of next month.

"My relationship with the CPA now is non-existent ..." he told reporters after claiming a firefight had narrowly been avoided between his guards and US-backed Iraqi police during the raid. "I am America's best friend in Iraq; if the CPA finds it necessary to direct an

Bush's candid confession

WASHINGTON, May 20. — Mr George W Bush has said the coalition is Iraq would transfer its authority to the sovereign Iraqi Government but warned that Baghdad could remain dangerous and unstable even after the transfer of political power.

"It's tough work there now because killers want to stop progress," the US President claimed following a meeting with Italian Prime Minister Mr Silvio Berlusconi, part of the US-led coalition in Iraq. "It's tough work after sovereignty is transferred because there will still be people trying to derail the election process." — PTI

armed attack against my home you can see the state of relations between the Coalition and the Iraqi people."

The former Pentagon favourite also called on Mr George W Bush to hand over sovereignty to the Iraqi people without delay. "My message to the

CPA is let my people go, let my people be free. We are grateful to President Bush for liberating Iraq but it is time for the Iraqi people to run their affairs," he said.

Mr Chalabi claimed US authorities in Iraq were angry with him because "I'm now calling for policies to liberate the Iraqi people, to get full sovereignty now and I am pushing the gate in a way they don't like".

Mr Chalabi, who once received US funding, has been at odds with his former patron on a number of issues recently. US officials here have complained privately that Mr Chalabi is interfering with a US investigation into allegations that Saddam Hussein's regime skimmed millions in oil revenues during the UN-run oil-for-food programme.

But Mr Dan Senor, a coalition spokesman, said investigation has "nothing to do with what transpired today".



A photograph released by ABC News shows Spc. Sabrina Harmon of the US military smiling before the body of an Iraqi who died at Abu Gharib prison. — AFP

Top General accepts abuse blame

WASHINGTON, May 20. — The General in overall command of US forces in Iraq has conceded that systemic and multiple failures lay behind the Abu Gharib scandal. Gen. John Abizaid told the Senate Armed Services Committee yesterday that parts of the military's system for holding enemy prisoners were "broken", and accepted responsibility. It also emerged yesterday that Pentagon investigators had uncovered a new computer disc of photographs. Legislators are to view

the pictures. In his testimony Gen. Abizaid conceded that US forces had investigated 75 cases of abusive treatment of prisoners in Iraq and Afghanistan since late 2002. The Pentagon had previously admitted to 35. It also emerged that US commanders had been alerted to the abuse earlier than has been acknowledged. But they treated a critical Red Cross report in "a light-hearted manner", a former commander of Abu Gharib said. — The Times, London

Suicide blast kills council head, blow to US

Baghdad, May 17 (Reuters): A suicide car bomber killed the head of Iraq's governing council today, a major new blow to US-led occupiers battling a Shia insurgency and a growing prisoner abuse scandal as they prepare to hand over sovereignty.

The bomber killed Izzedin Salim and six other people as a council convoy was heading into the heavily guarded "Green Zone" headquarters of the US-led authorities in central Baghdad for a meeting just six weeks before the handover.

The blast, which left a one-metre crater in the road, tore through several cars and a crowd of pedestrians lining up at a checkpoint to get into the compound of former Saddam Hussein palaces.

US officials said bombing bore the stamp of al Qaida figure Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. An Islamic website carried a claim of

responsibility from an Iraqi group, the "Arab Resistance Group - al-Rashid Brigades".

The bomb contained an artillery shell, like one a suicide bomber used against another Green Zone checkpoint on May 6 and which a group led by al-Zarqawi said it carried out, US officials said.

They also said a small amount of the nerve agent sarin was found in an artillery shell that exploded in Iraq a few days ago, the first announcement of a definitive discovery of any of the weapons of mass destruction on which Washington made its case for war.

Salim, who held the council's rotating presidency, had just spent three days in the northern city of Arbil with UN special envoy Lakhdar Brahimi, who is trying to forge a consensus on an interim government to take office on the handover and lead

Iraq to elections in January. Ghazi Ajil al-Yawar, a Sunni, takes over the presidency of the council.

Washington says the interim government's powers will be limited and security will be in the hands of US commanders, but some members of the council expected to form its core said today's suicide bomb proved they should yield control to the new government.

"The US security plan for Iraq has failed," Ahmad Chalabi said. "There is no alternative except to adopt a definition of sovereignty that includes full control over the security forces."

Members of the US-appointed council were clearly among the bombers' targets, said Mahmoud Othman, who is one of them. "If the security situation stays as it is, the sovereign government will be weak because the government won't be able to

function properly," he said. Britain, a staunch US ally, said the bomb would not force the coalition out of Iraq.

"We are not going to have any so-called quick exit, there will be no cutting and running," British Prime Minister Tony Blair said during a visit to Turkey.

But a spokeswoman for Blair said training of Iraqi security forces would be stepped up to allow them to take over quickly.

"The strategy is to allow the Iraqis to take control as soon as possible and to allow us to leave as soon as possible," she said. "We want Iraq to be run by Iraqis."

However, an uprising by the Mehdi Army of rebel cleric Moqtada al-Sadr in the main towns of the Shia south has stretched coalition forces. US defence officials said 3,600 soldiers would be sent to Iraq this summer from South Korea for a year.

Outrage at the treatment of Iraqi prisoners at the Abu Ghraib jail near Baghdad has shredded US credibility across the Arab world and threatened President George W. Bush's bid for re-election in November.

Red Cross head quits

The head of the Washington office of the International Committee of the Red Cross has resigned for "personal reasons," amid turmoil created by a secret ICRC report on Iraqi prisoner abuse by US forces.

Christophe Girod, a 17-year veteran of the international body, declined today to comment on his reasons for leaving and would not say whether his decision was linked to dismay over the body's handling of the Iraqi abuse scandal. "I am leaving for private reasons. I have had 17 years of the ICRC and it's time to try something else," said Girod.



Izzedin Salim: Brutal end

APD-13
1875

IRAQI RESISTANCE / SECURITY SITUATION WORSENS

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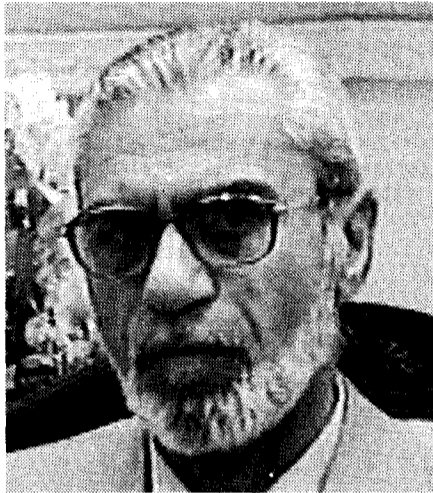
Governing Council head killed in blast

By Atul Aneja

MANAMA, MAY 17. The President of the U.S.-backed Iraqi Governing Council was killed in a suicide car bomb attack today in Baghdad's high security zone, amid signs that the security situation was worsening ahead of the formal handover of authority to Iraqis at the end of next month. Ezzedine Salim, who belonged to the Islamic Dawwa Party and enjoyed strong support among Shias in the southern Iraqi city of Basra, was killed in the blast.

Witnesses said that he died while heading towards a checkpoint into the high security Green Zone. A red Volkswagen car pulled up next to a convoy of five white Nissan vehicles, one of which he occupied, and exploded. The massive blast heaved Mr. Salim's car to the opposite side of the road, wrecking it completely. At least 17 other vehicles were gutted and a large number of charred bodies and body parts lay strewn on the road.

Mr. Salim's driver and adviser were among the estimated eight Iraqis killed in the blast. Ten civilians were also injured. The Arab Resistance Movement al-Rashid Brigades posted a statement on the Inter-



Ezzedine Saleem

net saying it had carried out the attack on Mr. Salim. The group said two suicide bombers had been used to carry out "a qualitative heroic operation, which led to the killing of the traitor and mercenary. The Brigades pledges to the masses of our na-

tion to pursue struggle until the liberation of glorious Iraq and dear Palestine," said the statement on al-Anbar website.

Following Mr. Salim's assassination, Ghazi Ajil al-Yawer — a Sunni Muslim from the northern city of Mosul was appointed as his successor. Mr. Salim is the second member of the Council who has been assassinated. Aqila Hashemi, a woman member was killed in Baghdad when her vehicle was ambushed close to her residence in September last year. The killing of Mr. Salim had an immediate impact on international crude oil prices, which climbed to a record high of \$41.75 a barrel in the U.S., riding on fears that oil supplies from West Asia would not meet the rising global demand.

Mr. Salim's assassination precedes a crucial debate in the U.N. Security Council today, on a resolution to endorse the planned June 30 handover of power to an interim Iraqi government.

Adnan Ali, a senior member of the Daawa party said that security in Iraq following Mr. Salim's killing had reached a "very dangerous point. This is a very dangerous point and they can target any (Governing Council) member who leaves from the residence and enters into the Green Zone."

BJP ups ante against 'foreigner' Iraq council chief killed

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, May 17. — Raising the tempo of the stir against Mrs Sonia Gandhi, the BJP has decided to boycott her swearing-in as Prime Minister. The NDA, too, is likely to follow suit. Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee will, however, attend the ceremony as a matter of constitutional propriety.

The party has also decided not to formally participate in the anti-Sonia movement being planned by some leaders such as Mrs Sushma Swaraj, Mr KN Govindacharya and Ms Uma Bharati. It will, however, provide "moral support" to the brigade, to which Mr Narendra Modi may also join.

The BJP leadership has apparently decided that those who want to lead this movement should first quit the constitutional posts they are holding. Ms Bharati is likely to resign if the RSS assessment says that the movement will pick up momentum.

Ms Bharati met President Dr APJ Abdul Kalam and warned of a nationwide movement against Mrs Gandhi becoming the Prime Minister. "This



Mr M Venkaiah Naidu in Delhi on Monday. — PTI

would gravely endanger India's security as a foreigner will be privy to all top secret documents pertaining to the nation," she said, calling Mrs Gandhi "anari (greenhorn)".

Senior leaders calculate that after

Sushma's vow

NEW DELHI, May 17. — Mrs Sushma Swaraj will shave her head the day Mrs Sonia Gandhi is sworn in as Prime Minister. "I will lead the life of a *bhikshu* like Chankya till she is removed from the post," she told The Statesman. She plans to wear a white sari and sleep on the floor till her vow to dislodge Mrs Gandhi is achieved. — SNS

coming to power, Mrs Gandhi may dismiss Mr Modi's government to consolidate minority votes.

Although leaders feel this will improve BJP's position in Gujarat, the party doesn't want the Congress to achieve minority consolidation across the country. So the option is to allow Mr Modi to resign on an anti-Sonia plank and replace him with either Mr Kashiram Rana or Mr Vallabhbhai Kathirai.

Mr Govindacharya today formed Rashriya Swabhiman Andolan to oppose Mrs Gandhi becoming Prime Minister.

He announced a protest march from Jantar Mantar to Rashtrapati Bhavan tomorrow.



Izzadine Saleem (in red box) who was killed in a car bomb blast. — AFP

BAGHDAD, May 17. — The president of the Iraqi Governing Council was killed in a suicide car bombing near a US checkpoint in central Baghdad today dealing a blow to US efforts to stabilise Iraq ahead of a handover of sovereignty on 30 June.

Abdel-Zahraa Othman, also known as Izzadine Saleem, was the second and highest-ranking member of the US-appointed council assassina-

Iraq council chief killed

ted so far. He was among nine Iraqis, including a bomber, who were killed in the blast.

A previously unknown group claimed responsibility today for killing Saleem, saying in a website posting that two of its fighters carried out the operation against "the traitor and mercenary Izzadine Saleem."

The claim from a group that identified itself as the Arab Resistance Movement was posted on an Internet site devoted to Iraqi issues and that opens with a map of Iraq cut from the old Iraqi flag, which was replaced after the ouster of Saddam Hussein. It was not possible to verify the authenticity of the claim.

"Two heroic members of the Arab Resistance Movement, Al-Rashid Brigades — and they are Ali Khaled al-Jabouri and Mohammed Hassan al-Samaraci — carried out a qualitative heroic operation" that killed Saleem, the statement said. "Days like today convince us even more so that the transfer of power must stay on track," Brig. Gen. Mark Kimmitt said on CNN. — AP

Another report on page 2

Sorry, but troops will stay

Reuters
Najaf, May 16

AS SHIA militia fought US and allied troops once again in at least two towns in southern Iraq on Sunday and buried their dead in the holy city of Najaf, Secretary of State Colin Powell tried to patch up the damage caused by the prison abuse scandal.

Offering an apology from Jordan, Powell said: "We are shocked by what happened at Abu Ghraib. We apologise to those who were abused in such an awful manner. Everybody says we should return sovereignty to the Iraqi people so that it no longer looks like an occupation. That's exactly what we are trying to do and what we plan to accomplish by the end of June, but they need our troops there for some considerable time in the future."

However, with the return of Iraqi sovereignty just 45 days away, there was little sign of an end to anti-American violence or popular hostility to occupation. Iraq's interior minister said it was unlikely that the new interim government would ask US-led forces to leave and that they should maintain considerable freedom of action within Iraq. "We can't have a situation where there is a threat to security every time we go through the political and bureaucratic procedure of getting approvals," Samir Sumaidy said.

Meanwhile, a guerrilla was killed and three others wounded as US tanks dominated the streets of Karbala on Sunday, exchanging fire with rebel cleric Moqtada al-Sadr's fighters, who retaliated with mortars and rocket-propelled grenades.

In Nassiriya, Italian troops, too, clashed with Sadr fighters who have taken up positions in the town since Friday. Four Italian soldiers were wounded on Sunday when a rocket-propelled grenade hit their vehicle. After an overnight siege of Nassiriya's occupation authority headquarters, most civilian staff were evacuated on Saturday to a military base, an Italian military spokesman said.

US-led forces have been trying to drive away Sadr's men from several cities over the past two weeks. US commanders say they are constrained, particularly in Karbala and around Sadr's main base in Najaf, by efforts to avoid damaging sacred sites, where fighters are taking refuge. On Friday, however, tanks had trampled the holy ground in Najaf's



Popularity in free fall

A *NEWSWEEK* poll released on Saturday put President George Bush's overall job approval at 42 per cent, the lowest yet during his tenure, as problems in Iraq crowd out other issues for voters. Other recent surveys have rated Bush in the mid-40s.

"Iraq is sucking the life out of other issue deliberations among the voters in the campaign," said political scientist Douglas Strand of the University of California-Berkeley. It has been found Iraq has had a more dominant effect on the campaign since April 1. Gay marriage and other domestic issues have faded from voters' concerns.

Meanwhile, British Prime Minister Tony Blair's popularity, wounded by his Iraq policy, has also slumped.

According to a poll by *Sunday Times*, nearly 46 per cent of the voters think Blair should step down, another 22 per cent want him to go soon after the next elections and just 20 per cent said he should carry on as PM if elected.

Agencies

sprawling ancient cemetery for the first time.

Impatient with Sadr, a firebrand leader with a strong following among impoverished Shia youths, Iraqi political and religious leaders are also concerned about the US military inroads into the holy cities.

The Iraqi Islamic Party, a Sunni Muslim group represented on the US-appointed Iraqi

Governing Council, issued a statement on Sunday calling on American troops to "abandon the military solution" and pull out of Najaf and Karbala.

In Baghdad, gunmen fired at a minibus killing two Iraqi women who were working for the US-led coalition. Assailants in a southern city also killed a coalition translator and critically injured another. The killings were part of a rebel strategy to deter cooperation between Iraqis and the coalition that plans to hand over sovereignty on June 30.

In Najaf, al-Sadr accused Washington's British allies of murdering prisoners from Sadr's Mehdi Army and mutilating their bodies. The guerrillas buried 22 comrades in Najaf, who, he said, died as a result of a battle with the British near Amara on Friday.

Powell scolds Arab world

Secretary of State Colin Powell scolded Arab governments Sunday for not expressing more outrage over the videotaped beheading of American civilian Nicholas Berg in Iraq. He also pledged action against American military prison guards and others responsible for prisoner abuses in Iraq. Powell said he has made clear, specifically to Arab leaders, that systematic torture of prisoners is unacceptable anywhere. Yet, he said, their denunciation of the killing of Berg fell far short of their attacks on the US for the treatment of detainees at the Abu Ghraib prison. The beheading of the 26-year-old was broadcast on an Islamic militant Web site.

US soldier killed in Afghanistan

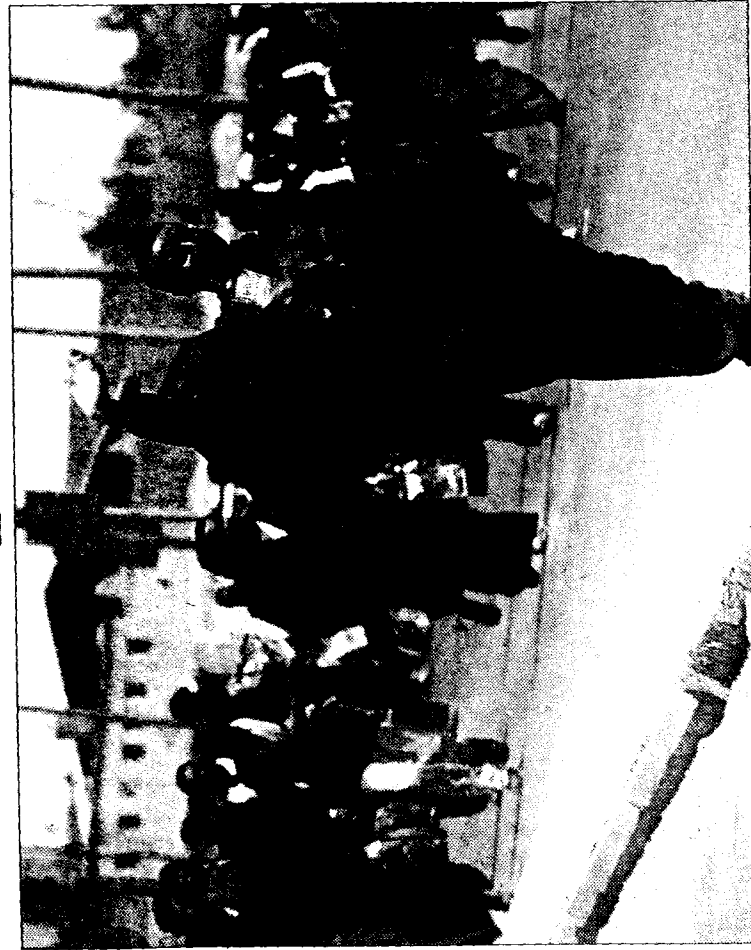
Suspected insurgents attacked a coalition combat patrol in southern Afghanistan on Saturday killing an American soldier and wounding two others.

US military spokesman in Kabul Lt.-Col. Michele DeWerth said one anti-coalition fighter was detained on Sunday in connection with the attack. However, Intelligence sources said Afghan agents had arrested two Taliban suspects to be brothers of Mullah Abdul Ghafoor, the Taliban's district commander before the ouster of the hardline regime.

Meanwhile, the Afghan police arrested six more suspected Taliban agents for smuggling arms in Panjwayi district of Kandahar.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES 17 MAY 2006

US troops release 300 Abu Gharib prisoners



Freed prisoners from Abu Gharib prison take the road back home after their release on Friday. — AFP

Associated Press

ABU GHARIB, May 14. — More than 300 Iraqi detainees, some weeping and waving to friends, were released from the Abu Gharib prison today, a day after US Defence Secretary Mr Donald H Rumsfeld made a surprise visit and insisted the Pentagon did not try to cover up abuses there.

One bus carrying 40 prisoners left the jail and drove to an American military base in west Baghdad, where tribal leaders awaited some of them. One by one, prisoners got out, kneeled, and prayed beside the bus. Others left on the same bus, bound for other Baghdad neighbourhoods. Hundreds of relatives of those detained had stood

BAGHDAD, May 14. — Prisoners freed from the infamous prison today complained that they had been tortured by US guards, including being hung by their hands from walls and made to carry heavy loads.

Abu Mustafa (24), said he was arrested 10 months ago by US forces who accused him of being a leader of a terrorist group. "They kept me in solitary confinement for six days,"

outside the prison since early morning, waiting for their release.

US Marines blocked off both lanes of a highway as the first bus left the prison compound. At least five other buses left the prison.

The coalition periodical-

Tales from the chamber of horrors

he said. "They hung me by my hands from the wall for five hours."

"One day when I was in the hospital, a soldier came in and asked if I was a Muslim and then started having sex with another (female) soldier right in front of me." Md Zadian (45), who was detained for four months, said he was also hung from a wall by his hands for hours while he was "asked to confess that I attacked the

ly releases prisoners from the notorious Saddam-era jail, where abuses of prisoners by American soldiers have erupted into a major scandal and damaged the credibility of the US-led coalition government Iraq.

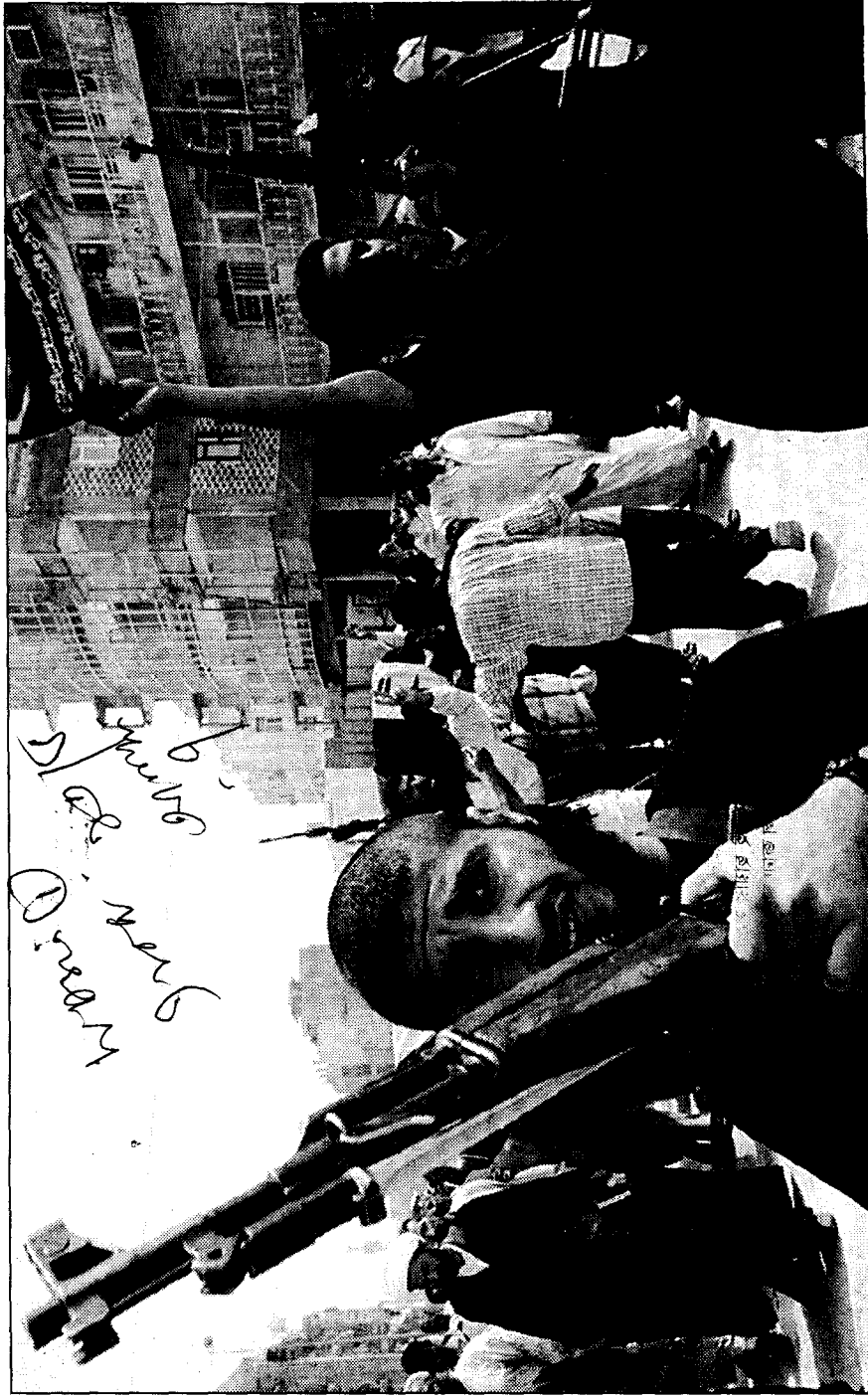
War crimes suit: French lawyer Mr Jacques Verges, who is part of Saddam Hussein's legal team, has said that he was filing a lawsuit at the International Criminal Court accusing UK of war crimes, AFP adds from Paris.

American forces". He added: "I saw them attach electric wires to the tongue and the genitals of my cousin. They also used to give me a box of food and made me carry it around for six hours without putting it down."

Md Khazal Al-Moussawi (31) who was held for eight months, said he went into the prison weighing 117 kg, and came out more than 30 kg lighter. — AFP

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Red Cross report adds fuel to abuse issue

70-90 per cent Iraqis held by mistake

Agencies
Geneva/London, May 10

A RED Cross report disclosed on Monday said coalition intelligence officers estimated that 70-90 per cent of Iraqi detainees were arrested by mistake and said Red Cross observers witnessed US officers mistreating Abu Ghraib prisoners by keeping them naked in total darkness in empty cells.

The report by the International Committee of the Red Cross supports its allegations that abuse of Iraqi prisoners by American soldiers was broad and "not individual acts" — contrary to President Bush's contention that the mistreatment "was the wrongdoing of a few".

"ICRC delegates directly witnessed and documented a variety of methods used to secure the cooperation of the persons deprived of their liberty with their interrogators," according to the confidential report.

The delegates saw in October how detainees at Abu Ghraib were kept "completely naked in totally empty concrete cells and in total darkness", the report said.

"Upon witnessing such cases, the ICRC interrupted its visits and requested an explanation from the authorities," the report said. "The military intelligence officer in charge of the interrogation explained that this practice was 'part of the process'."

This apparently meant that detainees were progressively given clothing, bedding, lighting and other items in exchange for cooperation, it said. It said it found evidence supporting prisoners' allegations of other forms of abuse during

arrest, initial detention and interrogation.

Among the evidence were burns, bruises and other injuries consistent with the abuse that prisoners alleged, it said. The 24-page document, confirmed by the ICRC as authentic after it was published on Monday by the *Wall Street Journal*, said the abuses were primarily during the interrogation stage by military intelligence.

Once the detainees were moved to regular prison facilities, the abuses typically

stopped, it said. The report cites abuses — some "tantamount to torture" — including brutality, hooding, humiliation and threats of "imminent execution".

The agency said arrests allegedly tended to follow a pattern. "Arresting authorities entered houses usually after dark, breaking down doors, waking up residents roughly, yelling orders, forcing family members into one room under military guard while searching the rest of the house and further breaking doors, cabinets and other property," the report said.

Damning evidence

Thirteen months after the fall of Saddam Hussein, Britain and the United States have been rocked by a scandal that only hit the headlines when graphic images were splashed across their national media of prisoners being humiliated and mistreated. While the allegations against US troops appear more serious and widespread, the row has further hampered Blair's efforts to move Britain's political agenda away from Iraq.

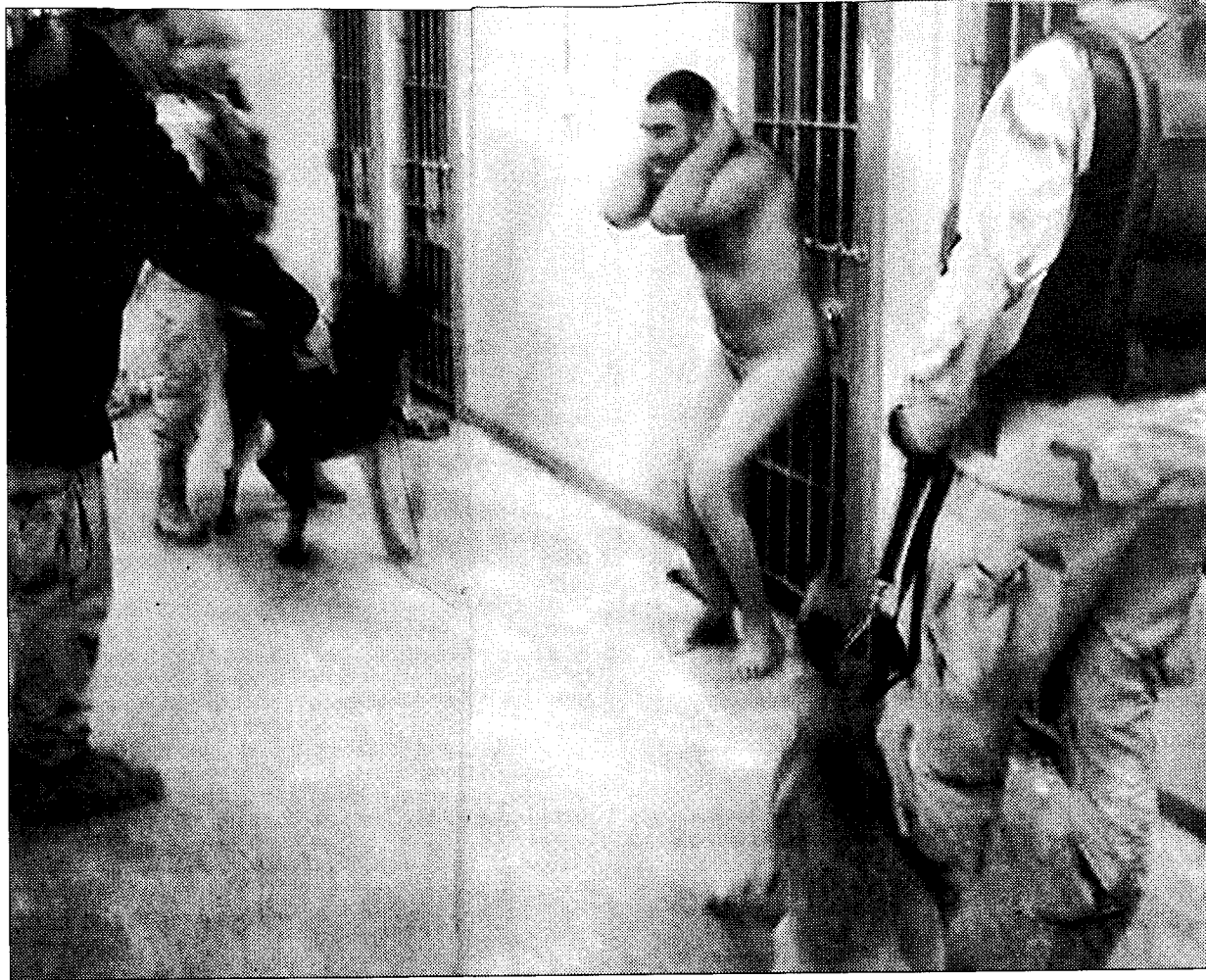
His popularity has plummeted since the war, even prompting talk of his possible resignation from some of his allies. The Red Cross report also described the death of an Iraqi prisoner in custody in the British zone Basra last September. His name is blacked out. Britain's Ministry of Defence said the allegation was not new, but appeared to be a reference to the death of an Iraqi detainee named Baha Musa, which Britain says it has been investigating since last year.



AP
An anti-Blair protest in London on Monday.

Blair apologises

PRIME MINISTER Tony Blair apologised on Sunday for the abuse of Iraqi prisoners by British soldiers. "We apologise deeply to anyone who has been mistreated by our soldiers," Blair said. The British government has disclosed that it was put on notice in February by the Red Cross that US and British troops were abusing prisoners, but withheld the information from Parliament.



NEW YORKER MAGAZINE VIA REUTERS
An Iraqi prisoner and American military dog handlers are shown in this photograph acquired by the *New Yorker Magazine*.

'Abu Ghraib whistleblower didn't seek limelight'

THE MILITARY policeman who blew the whistle on fellow soldiers who were photographed abusing Iraqi detainees has an independent streak and knew "right from wrong," say people who know him.

Spc. Joe Darby was commended in a military report for promptly alerting superiors after discovering

photographs of fellow 372nd Military Police Company personnel taking part in abuse of prisoners at the Abu Ghraib prison.

Darby, 24, who is still on duty overseas, "didn't worry about what people thought," said Robert Ewing, Darby's history teacher and football coach at North Star High near Jenners,

Pennsylvania "He wasn't one that went along with his peers." Darby "didn't realise that he had done anything that was super special," said sister-in-law Maxine Carroll. "The way he looks at it, he was just doing his job." Friends in Pennsylvania said they are proud of Darby.

AP, Philadelphia

Iraq furor

➤ Fresh revelations about Iraqi prisoner abuse — with photographs of a naked, cowering detainee in front of barking dogs — overwhelmed the Bush administration's efforts to contain the scandal and placed the future of Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld in further jeopardy

➤ The decision to allow a wide level of public access to Specialist Jeremy Sivits's courtmartial appears to reflect a conclusion by US commanders that the abuse and the photographs have severely damaged the credibility of the US enterprise in Iraq and the country's reputation in West Asia. The military will invite the Arab news media

➤ A furious Bush has demanded to see all photos and videos showing abuse of Iraq detainees, a senior White House source said late on Sunday. "The President was blindsided by the first TV images, he will not be blindsided again," the source said. The President has instructed Secretary of Defence Donald Rumsfeld to present him with all known images that could deepen the crisis

➤ No BBC employees will be fired over a disputed story that sparked a huge battle with the government and prompted the resignations of the broadcaster's two top officials, the BBC said on Monday. The BBC said it would keep disciplinary decisions about specific workers confidential

Iraq wants Arab peacekeepers: minister

Associated Press

CAIRO, May 10. — Iraqi leaders want Arab nations to send troops to patrol Iraq, but support for the idea is so sparse in the region that it won't make a formal request, Iraq's foreign minister said at a gathering of Arab foreign ministers.

"We presented it as a question: 'Is there any possibility to send Arab peacekeeping forces, though not from countries neighboring Iraq?'" foreign minister Mr Hoshiyar Zebari said. "The

Cemetery desecrated

GAZA CITY, May 10. — The tombs of British soldiers killed during World War I in Gaza City were desecrated, witnesses said today, adding that notorious pictures of Iraqi prisoners being abused by US troops and vengeful inscriptions were found on the site.

"Eight to 10 men smashed 32 tomb stones last night," said Mr Issam Jaradah, who is in charge of the northern Gaza City cemetery's maintenance.

Some of the infamous pictures depicting scenes of mistreatment inside the US-run Abu Gharib prison in Iraq were found stuck on the tombs, some of them also bearing the Nazi swastika and the inscription in English "Revenge", Mr Jaradah said. — AFP

response was not encouraging, and the subject was not followed up." He, how-

ever, added that that Iraqis remain interested in troops from the region —

although not from neighbours like Turkey because of opposition from Iraqi Kurds. "As an idea, yes ... we need the support," he said.

Mr Zebari appealed for support for his country's US-appointed interim government from the gathered foreign ministers, urging the ministers to stick to commitments made before a thwarted March summit to give qualified backing to the government and to plans for the United States to transfer sovereignty to Iraq on 30 June.

IF STATESMAN 11 MAY 2004

Digital camera strips America of its pride

CHRISTIAN DAVENPORT

The collection of photographs begins like a travelogue from Iraq. Here are US soldiers posing in front of a mosque. Here is a soldier riding a camel in the desert. And then: a soldier holding a leash tied around a man's neck in an Iraqi prison. He is naked, grimacing and lying on the floor.

Mixed in with more than 1,000 digital pictures obtained by *The Washington Post* are photographs of naked men, apparently prisoners, sprawled on top of one another while soldiers stand around them.

The graphic images appear to provide further visual evidence of the chaos and unprofessionalism at the prison detailed in a report by army Maj. Gen. Antonio M. Taguba. His report, which relied in part on the photographs, found "numerous incidents of sadistic, blatant, and wanton criminal abuses" that were inflicted on detainees.

This group of photographs, taken from the summer of 2003 through the winter, ranges widely from mundane images of everyday military life to pictures showing crude simulations of sex among soldiers. The new pictures appear to show American

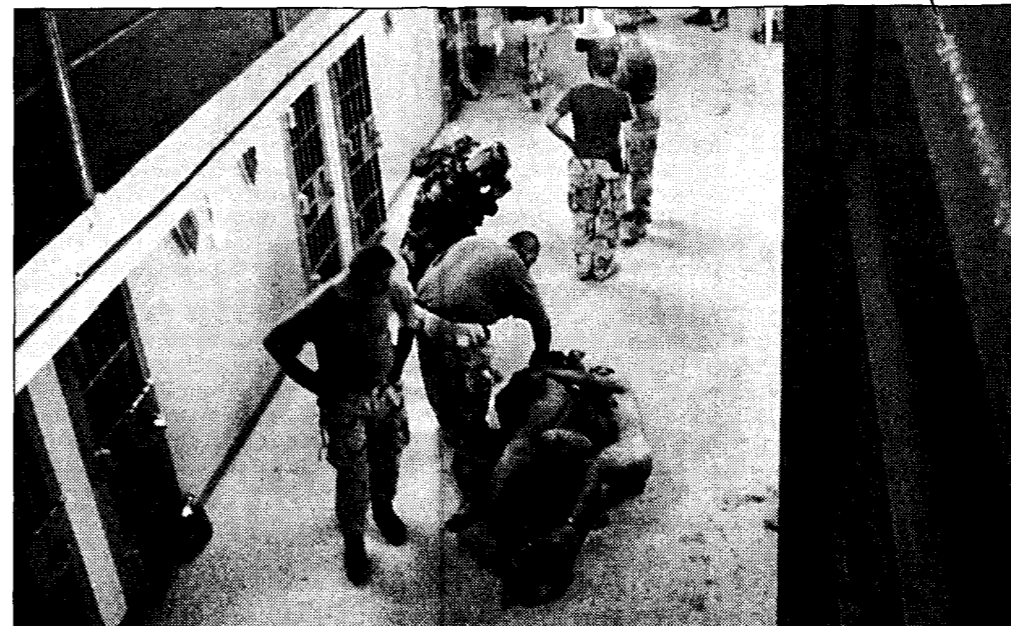
soldiers abusing prisoners, many of whom wear ID bands, but the *Post* could not eliminate the possibility that some of them were staged.

The photographs were taken by several digital cameras and loaded onto compact discs, which circulated among soldiers in the 372nd Military Police Company, an army reserve unit. The pictures were among those seized by military investigators probing conditions at the prison, a source close to the unit said.

The probe has led to charges being filed against six soldiers from the 372nd. "The allegations of abuse were substantiated by detailed witness statements and the discovery of extremely graphic photographic evidence," Taguba's report states.

For many units serving in Iraq, digital cameras are pervasive and yet another example of how technology has transformed the way troops communicate with relatives back home. From Basra to Baghdad, they e-mail pictures home. Some soldiers, including those in the 372nd, even packed video cameras along with their rifles.

In the case of prisoner abuse, the ubiquity of digital cameras has created a far more combustible international scandal that would have been sparked



A digital photograph shows a group of naked men bound together on the floor of the Abu Ghraib prison. (Reuters)

only by the release of Taguba's searing written report.

It is unclear who took the photographs, or why.

Lawyers of the accused and some soldiers' relatives have said the pictures were ordered up by military intelligence officials who were trying to humiliate the detainees and coerce other

prisoners into cooperating.

"It is clear that the intelligence community dictated that these photographs be taken," said Guy L. Womack, a Houston lawyer representing Charles A. Graner Jr, 35, one of the soldiers charged.

The father of another soldier facing charges, Jeremy C. Sivits,

also said his son was following orders. "He was asked to take pictures, and he did what he was told," Daniel Sivits said.

Woman in the picture

In Fort Ashby, West Virginia, two siblings and a friend identified Lynndie England, 21, as the soldier appearing in a pic-

ture holding a leash tied to the neck of a man on the floor. England, a member of the 372nd, has also been identified in published reports as one of the soldiers in the earlier set of pictures that were made public, which her relatives also confirmed.

England has been reassigned to Fort Bragg, North Carolina. The military has not charged her in the case.

England's friends and relatives said the photographs must have been staged. "It just makes me laugh, because that's not Lynn," said Destiny Goin, 21, a friend. "She wouldn't pull a dog by its neck, let alone drag a human across a floor."

England worked as a clerk in the unit, processing prisoners before they were put in cells, taking their names, fingerprinting them and giving them identification numbers, her family said. Other soldiers would ask her to pose for photographs, said her father, Kenneth England. "That's how it happened," he said.

Soon after CBS aired its photographs, Terrie England said she received a call from her daughter. "'Mom,' she told me, 'I was in the wrong place at the wrong time.'"

LOS ANGELES TIMES-WASHINGTON POST NEWS SERVICE

Top cop turns peeping Tom

San Francisco, May 6 (Reuters): The former head of a US military police unit at Baghdad's Abu Ghraib prison is under investigation following charges he secretly photographed naked female US soldiers as they showered, officials have said.

Captain Leo Merck, 32, a member of the California National Guard who commanded the 124-strong 870th Military Police Company, is under US Army investigation and has been relieved of duty, they said.

"Three of our soldiers were in the shower. If you just walked by the shower you could see their ankles," said Lieutenant Michael Drayton, who took over command of the unit after Merck was removed in November. "My understanding is that he was taking pictures. One of the soldiers noticed the flash."

Merck, a veteran of the first Gulf War who worked as a financial analyst before going to Iraq, is suspected of snapping the photographs in November. The incident is the latest embarrassment for the US occupying force in Iraq.

Merck, who is married and resides in Fremont, California, a suburb of San Francisco, is at an undisclosed location under US Army control. Drayton said Merck was taken to Kuwait. "The US Army justice system is working its wheels," California National Guard spokesman Andrew Hughan said.

The *Contra Costa Times*, which broke the story yesterday, quoted Spc. Myrna Hernandez, 26, as saying she saw Merck photograph her as she was showering with two other women. "I saw a guy get on all fours with a digital camera in his hands. His head was going under the wall, and we made eye contact," she told the newspaper. "I was in shock, like what do I do now?"

Merck enlisted in the National Guard in 1989 and has received decorations and service medals. "He was a very quiet guy," Drayton said. "He's an accountant and he fits the stereotype — very timid, non-talkative."

Report put off, Bush leads scramble to say sorry for jail abuse

US turns off rights trumpet

K.P. NAYAR

Review
10

Washington, May 5: Severely embarrassed by revelations about torture of Iraqi prisoners by American soldiers, the US state department has postponed the release of an annual report, ironically titled *Supporting Human Rights and Democracy: The US Record 2003-2004*.

The postponement came as President George W. Bush appeared on two Arab news channels to assure that "there will be investigations (and) people will be brought to justice".

He appeared on the Saudi-owned Al Arabiya channel and the US-run Al Hurra television to say that it was important for "the people of Iraq to know that everything is not perfect. That mistakes are made. But in a democracy, as well, those mistakes will be investigated, and people will be brought to justice".

Bush decided to address the Arab people after the army acknowledged yesterday that two Iraqi prisoners were killed by US soldiers last year. His appearance on Arab television came a day after Condoleezza Rice, his national security adviser, and Richard



U.S. ARMY
GO HOME

An Iraqi protests in front of Abu Ghraib prison. (Reuters)

Armitage, the deputy secretary of state, flitted from one Arabic channel to another, apologising for the US Army's actions in Abu Ghraib prison in Baghdad.

Rice, who has carefully cultivated the image of a strong lady not to be trifled with by the media, was for once subdued when she told the Dubai-based Al Arabiya that "we are deeply sorry for what has happened to these people and what the families (of Iraqi prisoners) must be feeling". She also appeared on Al Jazeera, the Arabic channel which has been vilified in Washington.

"Frankly, I couldn't be sorrier that some Iraqi prisoners had to suffer from this humiliation," Armitage told Al Hurra.

State department officials told reporters privately yesterday that the human rights report had been postponed because of the prison scandal, but the official line was the report was not ready. Strangely, hours after reporters were told about the postponement, secretary of state Colin Powell admitted that he did not know anything about the delay.

Glare on Rumsfeld, Page 4

6 MAY 2004

US probes prisoner deaths

Reuters

Washington, May 5

TWO IRAQI prisoners were murdered by Americans and 23 other deaths are being investigated in Iraq and Afghanistan, the United States revealed on Tuesday as the Bush administration tried to contain growing outrage over the abuse of Iraqi detainees.

Photographs showing Iraqi prisoners stripped of their clothes and being humiliated and abused have badly damaged US prestige and credibility, especially in the Arab world.

"The actions of the soldiers in those photographs are totally unacceptable and un-American," Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld said. "Anyone who was engaged in such action let down their comrades who serve honourably each day and they let down their country."

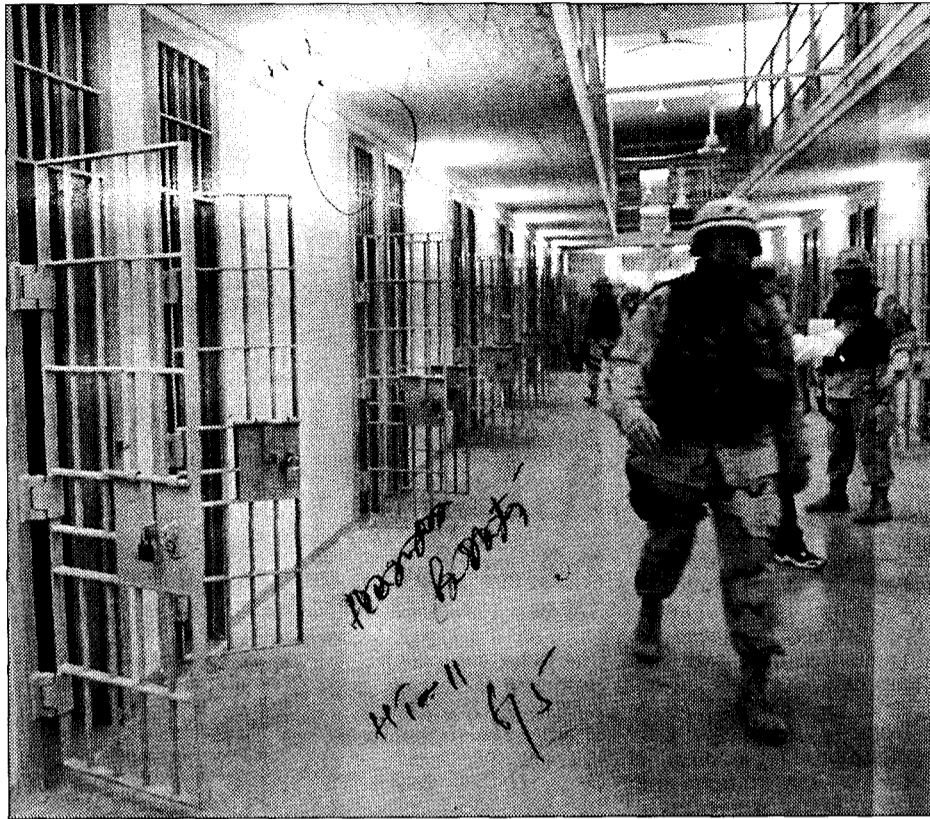
Army officials said the military had investigated the deaths of 25 prisoners held by American forces in Iraq and Afghanistan and determined that an Army soldier and a CIA contractor each murdered a prisoner. Most of the deaths occurred in Iraq.

An Army official said a soldier was convicted in the US military justice system of homicide for shooting a prisoner to death in September 2003 at a detention centre in Iraq. The official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said a private contractor who worked for the CIA was found to have committed the other homicide against a prisoner.

Army investigators determined the death of the prisoner in November was a homicide, and turned the case over to the Justice Department, which was investigating, Army officials said on Tuesday. An additional 20 deaths and assaults of prisoners were still under investigation, they said.

Secretary of State Colin Powell, at the United Nations for consultations on West Asia, said only a "small number" of American troops had been involved in the abuse and vowed wrongdoers would be quickly brought to justice.

Iraqi prisoners have complained of inhumane treatment by US troops at other



US soldiers patrol the Abu Ghraib prison on Wednesday.

AP

centres as well. The new US commander overseeing military-run prisons in Iraq, Maj. Gen. Geoffrey Miller, said there are an estimated 8,000 detainees, about half of them at Abu Ghraib. The two other main prisons are at the southern port city of Umm Qasr and at the Baghdad International Airport. *The Washington Post* reported on its website.

Miller said the US military runs 11 other detention facilities in Iraq where prisoners can be held for up to 14 days before a decision is made to release them or transfer them to one of the three main prisons, the newspaper said.

Shocking excerpts from a report on the abuse completed on March 3 by Maj. Gen. Antonio Taguba were

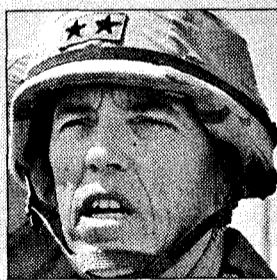
likely to further stoke fury at home and abroad.

On Capitol Hill, angry Republicans and Democrats denounced the abuses. The Senate Intelligence Committee scheduled a closed hearing for Wednesday. "The prisoner abuse is so disgusting, so degrading, that I think humanity has been hurt broadly," said Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist.

Top US official apologises for abuse

THE COMMANDER of US-run prisons in Iraq apologised on Wednesday in the name of the US and the American people for the "illegal or unauthorised acts" committed by a "small number of our soldiers" at the Abu Ghraib prison.

"I would like to apologise for our nation and for our military for the small number of soldiers who committed illegal or unauthorised acts here at Abu Ghraib," Maj. Gen. Geoffrey Miller told a group of Arab and western report-



Maj. Gen. Geoffrey Miller

ers taken by the military on a tour of the prison.

"These are violations not only of our national

policy but of how we conduct ourselves as members of the international community," Miller added. "It has brought a cloud over all the efforts of all of our soldiers and we will work our hardest to re-establish the trust that Iraqis feel for the coalition and the confidence people in American have in their military."

Miller repeated that some interrogation techniques would be halted as a result of the scandal and others would be toned down.

Agencies, Baghdad

Bush says abuse is 'abhorrent'

President George W. Bush on Wednesday vowed that any US troops guilty of 'abhorrent' abuse of Iraqi prisoners will be punished. 'We want to know the truth,' Bush said in an exclusive interview with the US-sponsored al-Hurra television network

Bush, speaking a day after national security adviser Condoleezza Rice said the US was 'deeply sorry' for the assaults, however, did not apologise

He said he had discussed the scandal with Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld. 'I said, find the truth, and then tell the Iraqi people and the world the truth,' Bush said

Secretary of State Colin Powell had said he was shocked by the revelations but that a 'fairly small number of soldiers' was involved

Bush said the US military had opened an investigation in January but that he personally wasn't aware of the photographs until CBS TV broadcast them

Many of the abuse allegations were contained in an internal Pentagon report completed in March. Senate Minority Leader Tom Daschle demanded to know why Bush was not earlier informed of the report

Agencies, Washington



REUTERS

President Bush during his television interview with Al-Hurra from the White House on Wednesday.



Iraqi soldiers of the "Fallujah Brigade" replace a U.S. Marine position on the outskirts of Fallujah on Tuesday. The brigade is a temporary force formed after a deal with the Marines to halt bloodshed and ensure security in the restive city. — AFP

ABU GHRAIB PRISON / TENSION CONTINUES

Iraqis express anger against U.S. forces

AD-16
SP

ABU GHRAIB (IRAQ), MAY 4. U.S. authorities freed some 240 inmates from the notorious Abu Ghraib prison near Baghdad to waiting relatives today, amid continuing tension over the abuse of prisoners by military guards.

At midday today, scores clustered around a U.S. soldier who emerged at the dusty perimeter of the sprawling complex to announce the names of those released to a crowd of some 200 people, but most were left disappointed.

The authorities regularly free inmates from Abu Ghraib but some 5,000 so-called "security detainees" remain inside, some of whom have been held since the U.S.-led invasion of the country in March last year.

The publication of pictures of the sexual humiliation and abuse of detenus at Abu Ghraib by U.S. guards has sparked bewilderment and fear among Iraqis with friends and relatives in the jail.

Regular releases have failed to mollify those who wait outside, including some who say they have been coming every day for months without getting

the chance to see their relatives.

Abu Ghraib, some 32 km west of Baghdad, was where thousands of political prisoners were tortured and executed under Saddam Hussein. As many as 4,000 prisoners were executed there in 1984.

Despite the huge death toll from Saddam Hussein's time and a U.S. investigation that has seen six guards charged with criminal offences and seven officers reprimanded, few outside the jail were convinced that

much had changed.

"They are animals, they are not human beings," said Farouk Khalaf, whose three brothers, aged in their 30s, were all being held in Abu Ghraib after being arrested by Iraqi paramilitary forces near Tikrit in February.

"When prisoners were released before they were too afraid to speak about what had happened in Abu Ghraib. Since these pictures were released, now most are speaking about their ordeals," he said. — AFP

Human Rights Minister quits

BAGHDAD, MAY 4. The U.S.-led Coalition has accepted the resignation of Iraq's Human Rights Minister, Abdel Basset Turki, who quit his post on April 8 in anger over U.S. military offensives on Fallujah and Najaf, the Ministry's spokesman said.

"The resignation was accepted on Sunday by the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA)," its spokesman, Jihad Zair, said.

The U.S.-dominated CPA has cited human rights as a motivating factor in the invasion last spring to oust the authoritarian regime of Saddam Hussein. The Coalition demanded human rights protections be inserted into the transitional law that is expected to govern Iraq until a permanent constitution is drafted by the end of 2005. But the scenes of intense street fighting when U.S. forces assaulted Fallujah on April 5 on the hunt for insurgents who brutally murdered four U.S. contractors a day before, triggered revulsion among pro-Coalition Iraqis. — AFP

CBS delayed abuse report on army's request

Washington: The American TV network CBS News delayed broadcasting for two weeks the report on US soldiers' abuse of Iraqi prisoners after a personal request from chairman of the joint chiefs of staff General Richard Myers who thought it would be "particularly inflammatory" when a battle was going on in full swing in Falluja.

Gen Myers called CBS anchor Dan Rather eight days before the report was to be aired and asked for extra time, said Jeff Fager, executive producer of CBS' TV's '60 minutes II' programme, which showed on Wednesday last the atrocities on detainees in Iraq's Abu Ghraib prison.

Myers confirmed that he made such a request. "You can't keep this out of the news, clearly. But I thought it would be particularly inflammatory at the time," Gen Myers told ABC-TV on Monday. He wanted eight more days' delay but CBS could not grant it because the independent *New Yorker* magazine was preparing a dispatch on the same subject and CBS would have been beaten in competition if it delayed further.

"It's hard to just make those kinds of decisions," Fager said. "It's not natural for us; the natural thing is to put it on the air. But the circumstances were quite unusual and I think you have to consider that," he added.

The programme, that included images taken last year allegedly showing Iraqis stripped naked, hooded and being tortured by US captors, provoked worldwide outrage.

Meanwhile an internal US army investigation has found a virtual collapse of the command structure in the Abu Ghraib prison.

Quoting a report on the probe, it said mid-level military intelligence officers were allowed to skirt the normal chain of command



The mother of an Iraqi prisoner cries as she stands at the entrance of the Abu Ghraib prison waiting for information on Tuesday

to issue questionable orders to enlisted personnel from the reserve military police unit handling guard duty there.

The army has already begun one investigation into the abuse allegations. Major General George R Fay, the incoming deputy commander of army intelligence, is examining the interrogation practices of military intelligence officers at all American-run prisons in Iraq and not just the Abu Ghraib prison, the *New York Times* said.

A second review was ordered on Saturday by Lt. Gen. James R Helmly, head of the army reserve, to assess the training of all reservists, especially military police and intelligence officers, the soldiers most likely to handle prisoners.

Six members of an army reserve military police unit assigned to Abu Ghraib face charges of assault, cruelty, indecent acts and maltreatment of detainees.

Gary Myers, a lawyer for staff Sgt. Ivan L. Frederick II, one of the enlisted men charged in the case, requested that the army open a court of inquiry into the issue.

The widening prison-abuse scandal in Iraq holds the potential to damage efforts by American officials to meet a June 30 deadline to transfer limited self-rule to the Iraqis. US President George W Bush held a discussion with defence secretary Donald Rumsfeld on the strong actions and steps that the military is taking to address matters in the prison system in Iraq and prevent prisoner abuse.

Bush and Colin Powell met on Monday to discuss the US administration's and military's response to the revelations of abuse according to White House spokesman Scott McClellan. "The President wanted to make sure that appropriate action was being taken against those responsible for these shameful, appalling acts," McClellan said at his briefing here on Monday.

US frees 240 Abu Ghraib PoWs

Abu Ghraib (Iraq): US authorities freed some 240 inmates from the Abu Ghraib prison to waiting relatives on Tuesday, amid continuing tension over the abuse of prisoners by military guards.

At midday, scores clustered around a US soldier who emerged at the dusty perimeter of the sprawling complex to announce the names of those released to a crowd of some 200 people, but most were left disappointed.

The authorities regularly free inmates from Abu Ghraib but some 5,000 so-called "security detainees" remain inside, some of whom have been held since the US-led invasion of the country in March last year which toppled Saddam Hussein.

The publication of pictures of the sexual humiliation and abuse of detainees at the prison here by US guards has sparked bewilderment and fear among Iraqis with friends and relatives in the jail. AFP

বন্দি ইরাকি সেনাদের উপরে নির্যাতনের ছবি, বিব্রত বৃশ-ব্ল্যায়ার

ওয়াশিংটন ও লন্ডন, ২ মে—
বাগদাদের কুখ্যাত জেল আবু যারিবে বন্দি
ইরাকি সেনাদের উপর পাশবিক
অত্যাচারের ছবি ও নথিপত্র প্রকাশ হতে
শুরু করার পরে দুনিয়া জুড়ে আলোড়ন
সেথা দিয়েছে।

সাদ্দাম জমানায় বিরোধীদের উপর
অত্যাচারের জন্য কুখ্যাত আবু যারিবে জেল
এখন মার্কিন সেনাবাহিনীর হাতে
ইরাকিদের বন্দিশালায় পরিণত হয়েছে।
আন্তর্জাতিক মানবাধিকার সংগঠনগুলি বেশ
কিছুদিন ধরেই ওই জেলে বন্দি ইরাকিদের
উপর অত্যাচারের অভিযোগ তুলছিল।
এখন মার্কিন সেনাবাহিনীর সূত্রেই পশ্চিমী
টি ভি ও সংবাদপত্রে আবু যারিবে জেলে
ইরাকি বন্দিদের উপর মার্কিন সেনাদের
নারকীয় অত্যাচারের ছবি ও তথ্য বেরিয়ে
দ্রাসায় আমেরিকা ও ব্রিটেন স্পষ্টতই
কিছুটা বিব্রত।

অন্য দিকে, আরব দুনিয়া ও এশিয়ার
মুসলিম প্রধান দেশগুলিতে প্রতিবাদের ঝড়
উঠছে। অ্যান্‌নেক্সি ইন্টারন্যাশনাল তো
সাফ জানিয়েছে, একটি ঘটনার কথা
জানা জানি হয়েছে ঠিকই, কিন্তু মার্কিন
সেনারা বন্দিদের উপর এরকম আরও
ভ্রুৎকে অত্যাচারই চালাচ্ছে। এ ব্যাপারে



আবু যারিবে নগ্ন বন্দিদের পিরামিড। পিছনে মার্কিন সেনার 'পোজ'।—এ পি

মার্কিন-ব্রিটিশ কর্তৃপক্ষকে তারা আগেই
সতর্ক করেছিলেন বলেও জানিয়েছেন।
আবু যারিবে জেলের ভিতরে ইরাকি
বন্দিদের উপর কী ভাবে মার্কিন সেনারা
অত্যাচার চালাচ্ছে, তা একটি মার্কিন টিভি
বিশদে দেখানোর পরে মার্কিন প্রেসিডেন্ট
জর্জ বৃশ মন্তব্য করেন, এই ঘটনায় তিনি
অত্যন্ত বিচলিত বোধ করছেন। কিন্তু তার
দাবি, এটি একেবারেই বিস্ময় ঘটনা, এবং
হাতে গোনা কয়েকজন মার্কিন সেনা এই
কাণ্ডে জড়িত। টিভির ছবিতে দেখানো
হয়েছিল, ইরাকি বন্দিদের নগ্ন করে
পিরামিডের মতো করে একের উপরে
অন্যকে দাঁড় করিয়ে রাখা হয়েছিল, আর
মার্কিন সেনারা হাসিমুখে আঙুল তুলে
'ভিকটি' চিহ্ন দেখাচ্ছিল। জেলের কর্মকাণ্ড
নির্মে মার্কিন সেনার একটি ৫০ পাতার
অভ্যন্তরীণ রিপোর্ট পরীক্ষা করে নিউ
ইয়র্কের একটি নারী পত্রিকা মন্তব্য করেছে,
ইরাকি বন্দিরা 'পাশবিক অত্যাচার ও যৌন
নিগ্রহের শিকার হয়েছে।' ইরাকে মার্কিন
সেনাবাহিনীর প্রধান লেঃ জেনারেল রিচার্ড
স্যান্ডেজও এই রিপোর্টের সত্যতা স্বীকার
করেছেন বলে পত্রিকারটির দাবি। আজ
উচ্চপদস্থ সামরিক অফিসার, (জর্জেন্ট
চীফস অফ স্টাফস-এর সভাপতি) রিচার্ড

কাজ করছে। উল্লেখ্য, বসরায় ৭৫০০
ব্রিটিশ সেনা রয়েছে। ব্রিটিশ সেনাবাহিনীর
দীর্ঘস্থায়ী জেনারেল স্যার মাইক জ্যাকসন
বসরার ঘটনার তদন্তের নির্দেশ দিয়েছেন।
এ দিকে ইরাকে বন্দি সেনাদের উপর
মার্কিন ও ব্রিটিশ সেনাবাহিনীর পাশবিক
অত্যাচারের কথা ছড়িয়ে পড়ার সঙ্গে সঙ্গে
বিশ্বের বিভিন্ন প্রান্ত থেকে প্রতিবাদ
আসছে। ইন্দোনেশিয়া ও মালয়েশিয়ার
মতো মুসলিমপ্রধান দেশ এ ঘটনায় মার্কিন-
ব্রিটিশ সেনাবাহিনীর কড়া নিন্দা করে
অবিলম্বে তাদের ইরাক ছাড়তে বলেছে।
পাকিস্তানের বিভিন্ন সংবাদপত্রে এই
ঘটনাকে 'বর্বরতা' বলে নিন্দা করা হয়েছে।
আরব দুনিয়ার প্রধান প্রধান টিভি চ্যানেল
মার্কিন টিভির রিপোর্ট আগাগোড়া
দেখানোর মানুষ মার্কিন নিন্দায় মুগ্ধ।
এরই মধ্যে ইরাকে যুদ্ধজয়ের আনুষ্ঠানিক
ঘোষণার প্রথম বর্ষপূর্তিতে গত রাতে বৃশ
হোয়াইট হাউসে সংবাদদাতাদের
শোভোভাজ্ঞাংশ নেন। সেখানে হাসি টাটা
চললেও ইরাক যুদ্ধের কথা কেউই এক
মুহূর্তের জন্যও তুলতে পারেননি। বৃশ
স্বীকার করেন, ইরাকে আমেরিকা কঠিন
পরীক্ষা ও আত্মত্যাগের মধ্য দিয়ে
চলেছে।"—রয়টার্স

মেয়ারস জানান, তিনি নিজে অভ্যন্তরীণ
রিপোর্ট দেখেননি। তবে, নিপীড়নের
অভিযোগ বাতিল করে দিতেও পারেননি।
মার্কিন সরকারি সূত্রে বলা হয়েছে, আবু
যারিবে জেলের দায়িত্বে থাকা ব্রিগেডিয়ার
জেনারেল জ্যানিস কারসিনাক্কির বিরুদ্ধে
শৃঙ্খলাভঙ্গের অভিযোগো শাস্তি দেওয়ার
কথা বিবেচনা করা হচ্ছে। কারসিনাক্কি
বলেছেন, জেলের যে সেলে এ ঘটনা ঘটে,
সেটি বিশেষ সামরিক গোয়েন্দা দফতরের
অধীনে ছিল, তাদের উৎসাহেই সেনারা ওই
কাণ্ডে যেতে থেকে থাকবে।
এ দিকে ব্রিটেনের একটি সংবাদপত্র
বসরায় ব্রিটিশ সেনারা কী ভাবে ইরাকি
বন্দির উপর অত্যাচার করেছে, তা ফলাও
করে ছবি সহ প্রকাশ করেছে। ওই পাঁচটি
ছবিতে দেখানো হয়েছে, ব্রিটিশ সেনারা
একজন ইরাকি বন্দির মাথা কাপড়ে মুড়ে
দিয়ে তাকে লাথি মারছে, গায়ে প্রহ্লাব
করছে ইত্যাদি। ব্রিটেনের প্রধানমন্ত্রী টনি
ব্ল্যায়ার বলেছেন, "এ সব কাজ কোনও
মতেই বরদাস্ত করা যায় না। আমরা ইরাকে
(সেনা নিয়ে) গিয়েছি এ সব বন্ধ করতে, এ
সব করতে নয়।" ব্ল্যায়ার ইরাকে কমরত
ব্রিটিশ সেনাদের তৃপ্তি প্রশংসা করে
বলেন, এমনভাবে তারা সেখানে খুবই ভাল

Fallujah — a traumatised, angry city

112-16 / H. Hamid
By Patrick Graham

FALLUJAH, MAY 2. Standing at the open slit trench, one of five in Fallujah's newest cemetery, Mustafa asks: "Would they do this in New York or California?"

A sign nearby reads "The Olympiads, Champions of Champions", the motto of Fallujah's football team. This was their stadium, rows of cinderblock seats overlooking a dusty field. Beside one of the 50-yard trenches, sit a pair of Sunshine high-top sneakers, heavy with rotting blood and flies.

Fresh red paint on slabs of cement portray the city's recent history. "Martyr, unknown, only bones," reads one grave marker. Another "Martyr, unknown, White Opal license 31297, Baghdad, Iraq," and in the same grave "Shahida (female martyr), headless, found beside Saad Mosque."

"All these people were killed because of four dead American soldiers," says Mustafa before ducking into a corridor to a smaller enclosure behind the field. This was the original makeshift cemetery before the dead overflowed into the football pitch — we lose count after 100. 'Snipers,' says Mustafa when he hears shots. Above, U.S. jets fly low, followed by a loud explosion somewhere in the city. 'Bomb,' says Mustafa.

On Friday, U.S. Marines handed over control of Fallujah to Major General Jassem Mohammed Saleh, who headed Saddam Hussein's infantry, and withdrew troops from positions close to the besieged city. Tanks left after pulling down barbed wire defences around the soft drinks factory where they had set up a base for the past three weeks.

Maj. Gen. Saleh is to take over as head of what U.S. officials are calling the "1st battalion of the proposed Falluja Brigade" — a new force to police the Sunni stronghold of 1,000 men, many of them former members of Mr. Hussein's army and some insurgents.

Mustafa Hamid, a 22-year old student in a nightshirt-like dishdasha, wandered into the football field on Friday afternoon. Iraqi police and soldiers stood in groups along the main road. But in the back streets resistance fighters move about, one of them in a commandeered police car. As Mustafa talked, a fighter rode up on a bicycle, a Kalashnikov over his shoulder. Wrapping a scarf around his face, the young Mujahiddin, as they call them now in Fallujah, begins asking questions about foreigners.

What will happen to fighters like this one is still unclear. The resistance is an unknown, almost uncontrollable, collection of fighters oblivious to the ceasefires that have come and gone. Perhaps Iraqi negotiators and soldiers can control them, perhaps not. It is difficult to gauge the support of the people of Fallujah for men like him but after three weeks of fighting many complain privately they are tired of the Mujahideen. But hatred of the Americans seems universal.

"The Americans are killing people who had nothing to do with the death of those four soldiers," says Mustafa referring again to the U.S. security contractors killed and dismembered at the beginning of April. The deaths were the ostensible reason for the attack on a city which the U.S. army spokesman, General Mark Kimmit, famously described as "not getting it." In fact, it was the U.S. army that never really 'got' Fallujah, militarily or culturally. For over eight months, it has been beyond their control, caught up in a cycle of violence that began on 28 April last year, when 17 Iraqis were killed by U.S. soldiers during a protest. Casualties mounted after September. By the time the Americans decided to assert themselves, local tribes, religious leaders and, perhaps, foreign fighters, were well supplied and waiting. Now the Americans have left a traumatised, angry city. — ©Guardian Newspapers Limited 2004

THE HINDU

3 MAY 2004

3 MAY 2004

US strikes pound Fallujah

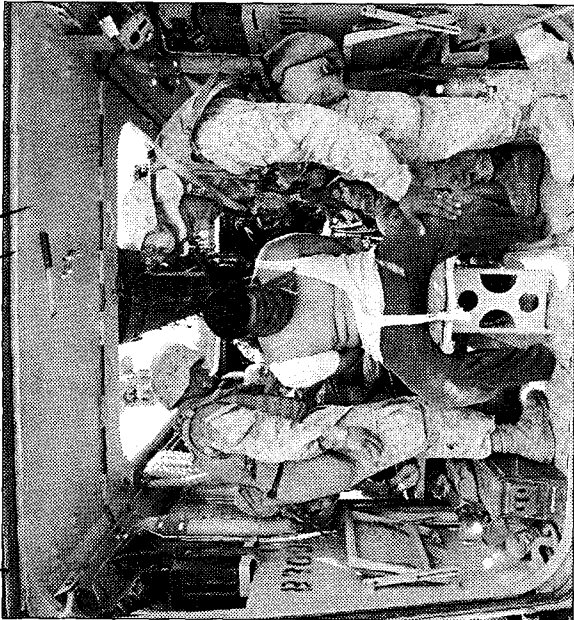
Agencies
Fallujah, April 28

A SERIES of explosions and gunfire rocked Fallujah on Wednesday in new fighting after a heavy battle the night before in which US warplanes and artillery pounded the city in a show of force against Sunni insurgents holed up in a slum.

Gunfire and mortar blasts could be heard for more than an hour from southwestern Fallujah in the afternoon, then three thunderous explosions shook the area as warplanes circled overhead. A black plume of smoke rose over the area.

Despite three straight days of battle, US officials say they are pushing ahead with negotiations to resolve the Fallujah standoff rather than launch an all-out offensive. Iraqi police took up posts in parts of the city, laying the groundwork for Marine patrols to begin circulating to establish control.

Earlier, on Tuesday night, US forces had unleashed a thunderous show of force against Sunni insurgents in Fallujah. The fighting came hours after a US deadline for rebels to hand over their weapons expired.



US Marines guard a wounded Iraqi rebel after a house-to-house search operation in a village near Fallujah.

US forces issued a statement saying the assault had been launched after an attack on Marine positions.

"The Marines responded by directing precision weaponry against the enemy forces to defend themselves," said the statement.

The Fallujah bombardment came soon after a US attack on Shia insurgents in Najaf, during which 64 Iraqis were killed. The Fallujah clashes appeared to be far heavier than those on Monday night, in which eight insurgents and one US Marine was killed.

Defence Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld said on Tuesday that continuing negotiations in Fallujah was

"worth a try." Gen Richard Myers, chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, also said the coalition had not given up on a ceasefire. But, he said in a speech in New York, "We don't have unlimited patience".

Brahimi on caretaker govt
While the battle was raging in Fallujah, the UN envoy for Iraq was insisting that a settlement in the city must be found. "Unless this standoff is brought to a resolution through peaceful means, there is a great risk of a very bloody confrontation", Lakhdar Brahimi said at the UN headquarters.

He also told the UN Security Council Iraq's caretaker government must be chosen by the end of May, so that it could prepare to take power properly a month later, and reach a new agreement with the US-led forces that would be in control of security.

Meanwhile, US troops aiming to capture Muqtada al-Sadr and suppress his militia on Wednesday began to expand their operations out of their base in Najaf. Soldiers set up checkpoints on the road outside the base.

TERROR UPDATE

Damascus Syria said it would not tolerate terror after an armed group set off a bomb in the capital's diplomatic quarter and four people were killed in ensuing gunbattles

Gaza A Palestinian suicide car-bomber hurt four Israeli soldiers who stopped him reaching his target in the Gaza Strip days ahead of a key vote on Ariel Sharon's Gaza pullout plan

Baghdad Thousands of Iraqi teachers sacked last year for membership of the now defunct Baath Party will be reinstated, the Iraqi education minister said

Berlin Germany would look 'with interest' at any Spanish initiative to find a solution to the conflict in Iraq within the UN framework

Jerusalem UN nuclear watchdog chief Mohamed ElBaradei, who has called for Israel to dismantle a nuclear arsenal it has never admitted possessing, is expected to visit the country this summer

Handwritten notes: "H. B. S. 1" and "9 min" in the top left margin.

FALLUJAH SIEGE / BOMBARDMENT STRATEGY FAILS

Iraq force to replace U.S. Marines

By Atul Aneja

Handwritten notes: "10-18" and "30/4" next to the author's name.

MANAMA, APRIL 29. Failing to disarm and silence Iraqi guerillas in Fallujah despite heavy bombardment, U.S. authorities have decided to hand over the security of the restive Sunni stronghold to a force of former Iraqi war veterans that served in the army of the former President, Saddam Hussein.

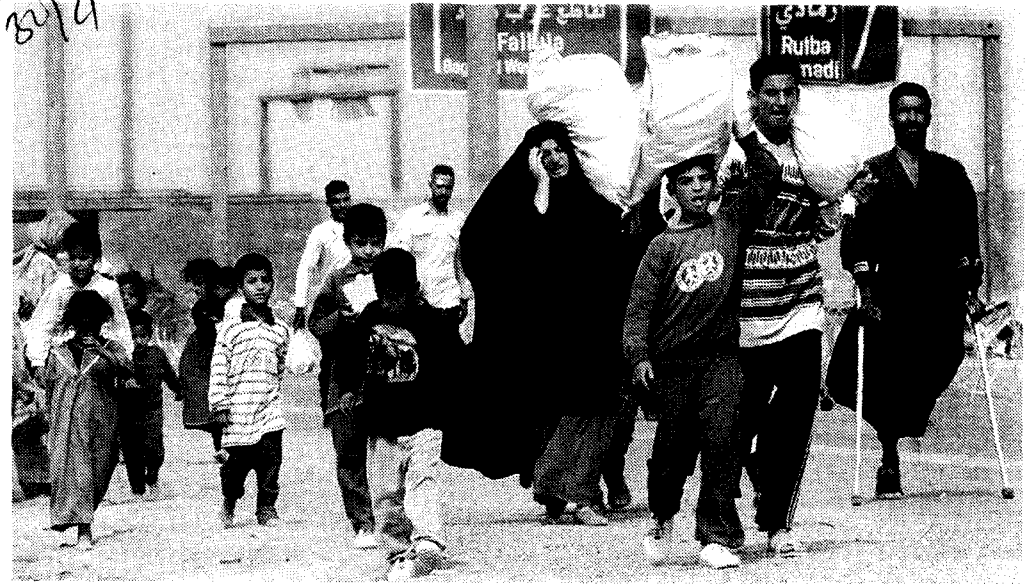
The 900-to-1000 strong "Fallujah Protection Army" is expected to relieve most of the U.S. soldiers (Marines) that are currently besieging Fallujah, in a phased manner. The entire exercise is expected to be completed in several weeks, but implementation will begin on Friday, the U.S. military command said. The Fallujah plan, which is a product of three days of brainstorming involving U.S. commanders and former Iraqi officers, does not envisage a ceasefire.

The new force will take over the cordon around Fallujah from U.S. troops and use force to subdue guerillas, if required.

10 soldiers killed

Meanwhile, 10 U.S. soldiers were killed today, with eight dying in a car bomb explosion in Mahmoudiya, south of Baghdad. The attack also wounded four troops.

A few hours earlier, a rocket-propelled grenade killed a U.S. soldier in eastern Baghdad, while another died in Baqubah, north of Baghdad. With these



Residents of Fallujah flee following clashes between U.S. Marines and resistance fighters on Thursday. — AFP

deaths, a total of 737 U.S. soldiers have been killed since the U.S. invaded Iraq. American deaths in April alone have risen to 126.

Faced with the heavy casualties, the U.S. has reversed its earlier decision to deploy lighter and more mobile forces to counter the Iraqi resistance. The Pentagon is now sending dozens of main battle tanks and other armoured vehicles to protect its troops better.

U.S. military sources were quoted as saying that the new Iraqi force would report to Lt. Gen. James P. Conway, the

overall commander of western Iraq, including Fallujah. The decision to deploy this predominantly Sunni force follows the recent shift in the U.S. policy of re-employing former soldiers of the Ba'ath Party who did not belong to the inner circles of Mr. Hussein's regime.

Analysts point out that the U.S. decision to resurrect a part of the former Iraqi army and deploy it along the Fallujah frontline was taken because the terms of the ceasefire that were being negotiated earlier, could not be enforced.

The guerillas had refused to

abide by the U.S. precondition to hand over their heavy weapons. American authorities, on their part, were wary of embarking on an all-out assault on the town as an alternative.

Apart from American casualties, it was feared that an armed incursion into Fallujah, leading to an inevitable loss of civilian lives, would have raised anti-U.S. sentiments in Iraq to unacceptably high levels.

Besides, the U.S. military was disinclined to consider giving safe passage to guerillas entrenched in Fallujah as a possible means to defuse the crisis.

43 rebels killed in Najaf

Associated Press
Baghdad, April 27

US TROOPS backed by helicopter gunships battled with insurgents overnight near the southern Shia city of Najaf, killing 43 gunmen and destroying an anti-aircraft system belonging to insurgents, the US military in Baghdad said on Tuesday.

The fighting began on Monday night and lasted several hours, a military spokesman said. It came as around 200 US forces made their first deployment inside Najaf, moving into a base that Spanish troops are vacating about three miles from holy shrines, near where an anti-American Shia Muslim cleric is holed up. Night footage taken by the Associated Press Television News – from a road between Najaf and the nearby town of Kufa – showed US army helicopters flying low over plumes of smoke rising from a green area and the sparks of flashes, likely from gunfire.

US commanders have said they will not move against the shrines in order to capture cleric Muqtada al-Sadr, whose armed supporters have launched attacks against the US-led forces. Attempts to capture al-Sadr have been put on hold while negotiators try to resolve the standoff. The Americans say they are aware that moving against the shrines could turn the cleric's limited revolt into a wider anti-US uprising by Iraq's Shia majority. The US military spokesman didn't give any more details of the fighting, besides saying the 43 insurgents were killed.

The patrols are a key part of the US efforts to establish a semblance of control over Fallujah without a wider assault, which would revive the bloody warfare seen earlier this month. The US decided to try the patrols after President Bush consulted with his commanders over the weekend, and the ceasefire was extended



A girl from Fallujah sits on the ground close to US soldiers as her family waits for permission to enter the city on Tuesday. AFP

in part to allow for patrols to be organised. The fighting in Fallujah was the latest violence to shake a two-week-old ceasefire. Still, US officials said they wanted to press forward with a political track, a day after abruptly toning down threats to launch a full-out assault on the city.

"We'll take the time necessary to see if there isn't a political solution", Secretary of State Colin Powell said on Monday.

On Monday, a workshop in Baghdad, believed to be producing chemical munitions, exploded in flames moments after US troops broke in to search it. Two American soldiers were killed and five wounded.

Spanish pull-out

Spanish troops in the US-led occupation forces in Iraq have completed their withdrawal from Najaf ahead of a total pull-out from Iraq, a military spokesman said on Tuesday. The announcement came as US forces, who have moved into the Najaf region to take the place of the Spaniards, were involved in heavy fighting with insurgents loyal to Muqtada al-Sadr.

The Spanish spokesman, General Jose Manuel Munoz, said the troops had withdrawn to Diwaniyah, headquarters for the 1,432-strong Spanish contingent.

Wary US troops roll into Najaf

Associated Press
Baghdad, April 26

US TROOPS rolled into a base in Najaf to replace Spanish forces who are withdrawing and to increase pressure on the militia of anti-US Shia cleric Muqtada al-Sadr in the south, even as an explosion levelled a building in Baghdad as US troops raided it on Monday, wounding at least one US soldier and several Iraqis.

The deployment brings the Americans about three miles from holy sites at the heart of the city.

Meanwhile, US troops will permanently take command of the two Iraqi provinces that have been controlled by Spanish-led forces, a Polish spokesman for the multi-national force said on Monday. The US soldiers will take over in Najaf and Qadisiyah provinces around May 27 after the expected withdrawal of some 2,000 troops from Spain, Honduras and the Dominican Republic, said Col. Robert Strzelecki from Camp Babylon, the headquarters of the Polish-led multinational troops.

The 1,300 Spanish troops in south-central Iraq are part of a 9,500-strong multinational force under Polish command. Poland, Britain and the United States command one of three sectors in Iraq. Poland will be

left in command of about 8,000 troops in three provinces — Babil, Wasit and Karbala — instead of five, Strzelecki said.

Heavy fighting broke out in Fallujah, west of the capital, despite attempts to extend a ceasefire.

Shia militias remain a threat in other southern cities, and on Sunday insurgents in Karbala fired at Bulgarian President Georgi Parvanov's motorcade during a brief visit to Iraq. The president's security detail fired back, and the attackers fled.

US commanders have said they will not go near the holy shrines in Najaf's ancient center, a move that could spark widespread outrage among Iraq's Shiite Muslim majority.

The U.S. military will take over security duties throughout Najaf province and the neighboring province of Qadisiyah after the withdrawal of Spanish, Dominican and Honduran forces this month, said a Polish spokesman, whose country's forces lead multinational peacekeepers in the area.

The extension of US forces would be a major reversal of American efforts to hand security duties in the south to its allies. But the coalition has been frayed by the Spanish-led pull-out and the eruption of fighting in the previously more peaceful south.

Spain's former prime minis-



US Army soldiers take cover while they explode a mine found shortly before on the highway leading to the airport of Baghdad on Monday. AP



REUTERS

US Army troops secure the area after four military vehicles were destroyed by a blast in Baghdad on Monday.

ter, meanwhile, issued his harshest public assessment of his successor's policy shift, calling the planned pullout of Spanish troops "appeasement."

The Baghdad explosion occurred when U.S. troops broke into a shop on the ground floor of a building in the northern Waziriya district. Moments afterward, the blast went off, leveling the front half of the one-story building and setting ablaze four Humvees parked outside.

A female American soldier was seen being taken away by troops, her face and chest severely burned. Witnesses reported seeing up to 10 US soldiers being loaded into ambulances. A US military spokesman confirmed Humvees were destroyed in the blast, but could not confirm US casualties. Several Iraqis were pulled from the rubble.

Teenagers later dragged away one of the burned-out Humvees, stripped it of equipment, and set it ablaze again. Some were seen afterward waving US weapons.

"This is for the madman Bush, for the madman Bremer," said one youth, waving a rifle and referring to President Bush (news - web sites) and the top American administrator in Iraq, L. Paul Bremer.

Residents differed over what was in the building. Some said it held a perfume factory, others said there has once been a scrap metal workshop that repaired weapons and recycled old ammunition.

Monday's fighting in Fallujah sent two large columns of heavy black smoke over the northern Jolan district, a poor neighborhood thought to have a large concentration of Sunni insurgents. Explosions rang out, along with the sound of mortars and heavy machine guns. The fighting came a day after US officials announced that a fragile cease-fire would be extended for two days and that political efforts at a resolution would continue, backing off warnings earlier this week that US Marines could launch a full-fledged offensive in the city within days.

Nato rider to wider Iraq role

Reuters
Oslo, April 26

NATO WILL only consider a wider role in Iraq if a string of conditions are met including a US handover to a "credible" government in Baghdad, secretary-general Jaap de Hoop Scheffer said on Monday.

During a visit to Norway, he said Nato was focused on getting more troops to Afghanistan rather than on helping stabilise Iraq after a planned transfer of power by Washington to a new Iraqi government on June 30.

"Afghanistan...is clearly the first priority," de Hoop Scheffer told a news conference after talks with Prime Minister Kjell Magne Bondevik. "The alliance should do

more to get the necessary forces on the ground in Afghanistan." Nato already has a strong commitment in Afghanistan, with some 6,500 troops in the capital Kabul. It also wants to widen reconstruction in the provinces outside Kabul.

Asked if Nato would consider a bigger role in Iraq, de Hoop Scheffer laid out a string of preconditions. "If there is a sovereign, legitimate Iraqi government with full powers after June 30, and that government would direct a request to Nato, and if that request would be made on the basis of a new UN Security Council resolution, giving a specific mandate to a stabilisation force, then I think Nato allies could enter in that discussion," he said.

Iraq: the violence spreads

By Jason Burke

AMERICAN TROOPS fighting insurgents killed scores of civilians in protracted battles in a remote town on Iraq's Syrian border last week. The deaths, not previously reported due to the remoteness of the area, will raise tensions still further in the country and make the increasingly frantic attempts by the United States-led coalition to ensure security and stability even harder.

On Saturday, the fragile ceasefire in the western city of Falluja, where around 600 civilians are believed to have been killed in nearly two weeks of intermittent fighting between U.S. marines and insurgents, appeared close to collapse. Increasingly impatient American military commanders promised action 'within days' if rebels continued to refuse their demands. They would not give details for reasons of 'operational security'.

The battles on the western frontier — seen as critical to cutting off the flow of logistic support and volunteer fighters from Syria — are going unnoticed. The Saturday before last, in Qaim, a city of around 100,000, U.S. marines were surprised by a contingent of 'anti-coalition fighters' — a loose alliance of former Baath party cadres and foreign militants behind the recent upsurge in violence. Five marines were killed and nine wounded. Medical sources in Qaim said the main hospital in the city had recorded 31 deaths, including the city's police chief, two women, a seven-year-old boy and a five-month-old baby, and 47 wounded.

Locals claim the dead were civilians shot by snipers or caught in crossfire. U.S. official sources say most of those killed were armed fighters.

The news will further inflame public opinion in Iraq where many have been angered by heavy-handed U.S. military tactics. The ongoing siege of Falluja has sparked outrage throughout Iraq. Senior coalition figures ad-

uncertainty over who will take control on June 30 and whether sufficient power will be ceded to any new administration to convince Iraqis that it is authentic. The Iraqi Governing Council has been deeply tainted by its failure to rein in the U.S. military.

Last week saw frantic politicking in Baghdad as candidates pressed for roles in the caretaker administration. Adnan Pachachi, a former Foreign Minister and likely choice for President, may have damaged his credibility by involvement with the IGC.

All Iraq's fractious minorities must be represented in the new government if it is to receive broad support. If Mr. Pachachi, from the Sunni minority, is appointed President then the Prime Minister will have to be a Shia, who comprise 60 per cent of the Iraqi population.

The new government also has to be acceptable to Iraq's powerful clerics. Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, a Shia religious scholar venerated by millions of Iraqis, has refused to deal with the Americans or the IGC so far. His backing, which may be secured only by concessions on the role of Islamic law, is critical to the success of any political set-up.

Last week the coalition authorities attempted to woo the Sunni population by reversing a previous ban on the employment of former cadres from Saddam's Baath party in the new army and civil service.

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Casualties on both sides are mounting as the violence spreads and jostling for power intensifies.

ity officials said that Al-Qaeda or an affiliated group was responsible. On Saturday police revealed they had intercepted a truck full of munitions being driven into Basra.

On Friday Muqtada al-Sadr, the radical Shia cleric who has seized control of the city of Najaf, threatened to unleash a wave of suicide bombers if coalition troops attempted to oust him from his stronghold. Hours earlier an attack by his Mahdi militia killed a coalition soldier. On Saturday, a rocket attack killed four U.S. soldiers at a base north of Baghdad, bringing the number of U.S. soldiers killed in April so far to 100, the highest total for a single month since the end of the war last year. More than 900 have been injured, at least 600 seriously in the same period. With fewer than half the 135,000 U.S. soldiers in Iraq deployed on active combat, military experts describe the death toll as 'significant'.

One obstacle to restoring order is

One obstacle to restoring order is

US troops to enter Najaf

Associated Press
Najaf, April 25

US TROOPS will possibly enter parts of Najaf soon to clamp down on a radical Shi'ite cleric's rebel militia, but they will stay away from sensitive holy sites in the centre of the city to avoid arousing religious outrage, a US general said on Sunday.

Shia leaders have warned of a possible explosion of anger among the country's Shia majority if US troops enter Najaf.

Until now, US commanders have been saying troops will not go in. With the new move, the military seeks to impose a degree of control in Najaf, while hoping a foray limited to the modern parts of the ancient city would not inflame Shi'ites. Brig. Gen. Mark Hertling did not say when troops would move in, or how many. American officials were attempting a similar, limited step in the war-torn city of Fallujah, the other main front of fighting.

US troops will begin patrols alongside the Iraqi security forces in Fallujah, said Hachim al-Hassani, a top Iraqi negotiator.

The move is an apparent attempt to restore control over the insurgent stronghold without a full-scale Marine assault.

But, like a previous agreement aimed at reducing the violence in the city, the new step hinged greatly on the response of Sunni guerrillas, who were asked to turn in their heavy weapons.

Al-Hassani said Fallujah residents had promised not to attack. But US officials have questioned if Fallujah civic leaders - who have been negotiating with the Americans - have enough influence over the insurgents. Guerrillas have not abided by a previous call from the civil lead-



A US soldier uses a metal detector to search an Iraqi girl returning to Fallujah on Sunday. AFP

ers to surrender their heavy weapons, US commanders say. In Baghdad on Sunday, a roadside bomb exploded by a US patrol, killing a US sol-

dier. Also on Sunday, a rocket hit close to a hospital in the northern city of Mosul, killing three people.

Elsewhere in the city, a

mortar hit a residential area, killing one Iraqi. Al-Hassani said the joint US-Iraqi patrols would begin on Tuesday in Fallujah.



A US Marine prays during an open-air Sunday mass in the military base near Fallujah on Sunday. REUTERS

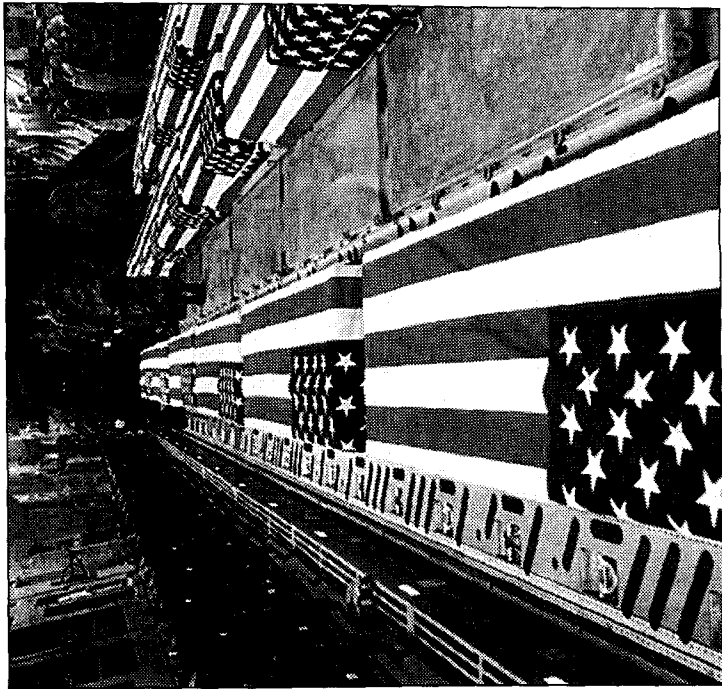
Conference call

PRESIDENT BUSH held a conference call on Saturday with his senior national security and military advisers to discuss the situation in Iraq, particularly restive Fallujah, a senior defence official said.

The official said the purpose of the teleconference was mainly for Gen. John Abizaid, the top US commander for the Middle East, to give Bush and others an update on the situation inside the city and the US Marines' readiness to resume offensive operations against thousands of insurgents hole up there.

AP, Washington

Sadr aims



US military personnel unload coffins at Dover Air Base in Delaware. A total of 360 pictures of the coffins taken by the air force at the base was released to www.thememoryhole.org by the Pentagon after the website requested them under the Freedom of Information Act. (AFP)

24 Apr 04 **Baghdad, April 23** (Reuters): A rebel Shia cleric Moqtada al-Sadr threatened today to unleash suicide bombers if US forces attacked Iraq's holy city of Najaf and US marines said they might renew an assault on the Sunni bastion of Falluja.

Fighters loyal to Moqtada al-Sadr ambushed a military convoy in the Shia shrine city of Karbala and clashed with Bulgarian troops deployed there.

The Bulgarian defence ministry said one of its soldiers wounded in the ambush of an armoured troop carrier near Karbala city had died.

"We will shed blood to keep our holy city," Sadr, who is based in Najaf, said in a Friday prayer sermon in the nearby town of Kufa. He said many men and women had asked his blessing for "martyrdom operations" against the Americans.

"I keep telling them to wait. But if there was an assault on our cities or on our religious authorities, we will be time bombs and will not stop before destroying enemy forces."

US forces are poised just outside Najaf and have vowed to kill or capture Sadr and destroy his Mehdi Army militia, but have allowed time for talks to defuse the standoff.

The Mehdi Army rose up across the mainly Shia south

this month, but US-led forces have regained control of most towns. Sadr's fighters still operate in Karbala and Najaf, which lie in a swathe of south-central Iraq supervised by a Polish-led multinational force.

Further south, an Italian soldier was wounded when his patrol came under fire near a polling station for a local election in Gharraf, near the town of Nassiriya. An Italian military



Moqtada al-Sadr

spokesman said the election had been postponed.

Guns were quiet in the Sunni stronghold of Falluja, but a US officer said Marines were ready to resume an offensive against insurgents in the city of 300,000.

Civilian volunteers used picks and shovels to dig bodies from houses flattened in fierce fighting in Falluja earlier this

Suicide bombers at US

month. Witnesses said three bodies had been recovered in the battered Golan district. Seven were found yesterday.

Colonel John Coleman, chief of staff of 1st Marine Expeditionary Force, said a possible new offensive would take on Saddam Hussein loyalists, foreign fighters, Muslim militants and armed criminals he said might join the fray.

Such a battle could shape Iraq's future, Coleman told reporters at Camp Falluja, a US base near the town. "As Falluja goes, so goes central Iraq. As central Iraq goes, so goes the nation," he said. "Falluja is the centre of gravity."

Over 2,000 Marines ring Falluja, ready for action if the US military decides that rebels have failed to turn in enough heavy weapons under a peace deal reached with civic leaders.

Asked whether a new offensive was imminent, Coleman said: "Isn't that clear from what I just said?"

Spain frees Indians

The Spanish judge investigating the March 11 train bombings in Madrid today freed two Indian suspects, Vinay Kohly and Suresh Kumar from custody, though the pair will remain under judicial supervision, judicial sources said.

Do not strike Falluja again: Sunni cleric

Baghdad, April 23 (AFP): A Sunni leader today warned that the US-led coalition would face an uprising throughout Iraq if its forces attack Falluja, which has been besieged by US marines since April 5.

"I have an urgent message for US forces. You have overstepped the red line. Make sure you do not strike Falluja again," Sheikh Ahmad Abdel Ghafur Samarrai said during Friday prayers at a Baghdad mosque.

"We will not allow the shedding of Iraqi blood. If you strike again, the whole of Iraq, from north to south, from east to west, will become Falluja," the Sunni cleric said. Located 50 km west of Baghdad, the Sunni city has been the scene of fierce fighting between coalition troops and insurgents in recent days.

Official figures show that a total of 271 Iraqis and dozens of US marines have been killed in Falluja since the troops lay siege to the city on April 5 following the slaying of four American contractors.

Baghdad prison raid kills 22

WAT 6 4 2/4

Baghdad, April 20 (Reuters): A deadly mortar barrage on a US-run prison in Baghdad killed 22 prisoners and wounded more than 90 today, a US military spokesperson said.

All the casualties at the Abu Ghraib jail just west of Baghdad were among the 4,400 people detained there on security grounds, he said.

Insurgents also attacked a US military convoy in the northern city of Mosul and one American soldier died of his wounds. Four others were injured, an army spokesperson said.

Elsewhere, tension eased in two flashpoint cities as a truce held in the Sunni bastion of Falluja and US forces prepared to pull back from a forward base near Najaf, where rebel Shia cleric Moqtada al-Sadr has taken refuge.

Witnesses said civilians who had fled battles between US Marines and Sunni insurgents trickled back to Falluja on foot, though vehicles were turned back at checkpoints.

Some shops reopened and some Iraqi police returned to duty. There was no sign of US forces in central parts of the city.

Thousands of Iraqis had left Falluja, 50 km west of Baghdad, to escape fierce fighting in which hundreds of civilians and dozens of Marines were killed this month.

The returnees were venturing back a day after the US military said it would not resume offensive operations in Falluja on condition rebels gave up their heavy weapons.

"I am confident that the guerrillas will turn in their heavy weapons as long as the Americans provide the guarantees they promised," said Fawzi Muthin, a 47-year-old engineer who was a member of Falluja's delegation in the talks.

US Marines launched a crackdown in Falluja on April 5 after crowds burned and mutilated the corpses of four US private security guards ambushed



A Spanish soldier of the international brigade Plus Ultra smiles at a baby at Talavera la Real air base in Badajoz, Iraq. (AFP)

there on March 31.

The fighting left the city of 300,000 people littered with burnt-out cars, pock-marked walls, charred houses and a sports ground turned into an emergency cemetery.

Many of the graves are still unnamed.

"Unknown, died in al-Khadra mosque", reads an inscription scrawled in paint on a stone leaning on a sandy mound that marks one grave. "Three children", says another.

US forces also gave Iraqi mediators more time to resolve a stand-off with Sadr and his Mehdi Army militia in the holy city of Najaf, south of Baghdad.

General Ricardo Sanchez, commanding US forces in Iraq, told soldiers of a 2,500-strong 3rd

Brigade Task Force he was pulling them back to avoid bloodshed in Najaf or damage to shrines sacred to Shias in Iraq and beyond.

"The problem of Sadr is bigger than Sadr. It is the whole Shia community and the holy shrine," Sanchez said as troops prepared to leave a base 20 km northwest of Najaf.

"We have just about eliminated all his influence across the south," he said, saying the cleric still had a limited presence in the towns of Diwaniya and Karbala.

Sanchez said there were "a whole bunch of initiatives" to resolve the crisis, but made clear Sadr was still a target. "Wherever we find him on the battlefield we kill him within the constraints that we have applied,"

he said. Cracks have appeared in the US-led coalition as it grapples with guerrilla attacks and a wave of kidnapping only 10 weeks before a planned handover of power to Iraqis.

Spain said yesterday it had begun withdrawing its 1,400-strong contingent from Iraq. Honduras said it would pull out its 370 troops as soon as possible.

But the White House insisted the US-led coalition remained stable and said the Bush administration hoped a new UN resolution for Iraq would spur other nations to take part in providing security and reconstruction assistance.

"The coalition in Iraq is strong and their resolve is firm," White House spokesperson Scott McClellan said.

US secretary of state Colin Powell said he had talked to the foreign minister or head of government of almost every other country in the coalition in the last 24 hours.

"And I'm getting solid support for our efforts, commitments to remain and finish the job that they came to do."

Spanish and Honduran troops are part of a Polish-led multinational division in mainly Shia south-central Iraq.

Thailand, which has 451 troops doing humanitarian work near Karbala, said they would be withdrawn if they were attacked. But Japan reiterated that its troops would stay in Iraq, where insurgents kidnapped five of its nationals this month. All were later freed.

In Rome, the UN special envoy for Iraq, Lakhdar Brahimi, said three Italian private security guards being held hostage in Iraq could be freed soon. Kidnappers demanding the withdrawal of Italian troops from Iraq have killed a fourth Italian hostage.

The death of the US soldier in Mosul raised to 111 the number of American troops killed in action since March 31 — more than in the major combat phase of the war from March 19 to April 30, 2003, when 109 died.

A total of 509 US soldiers have been killed in combat in Iraq.

Three of four bodies found after an attack on a supply convoy in Iraq on April 9 have been identified as workers for Halliburton, the Texas-based company said today.

"We grieve today for the tragic and sudden loss of our co-workers. Halliburton extends its sincere condolences to the families of these employees," spokeswoman Wendy Hall said.

The state department said a week ago four bodies had been found after the attack on the convoy west of Baghdad on April 9. The identity of the fourth person has not been announced.

Surrender, Iraq leaders tell rebels

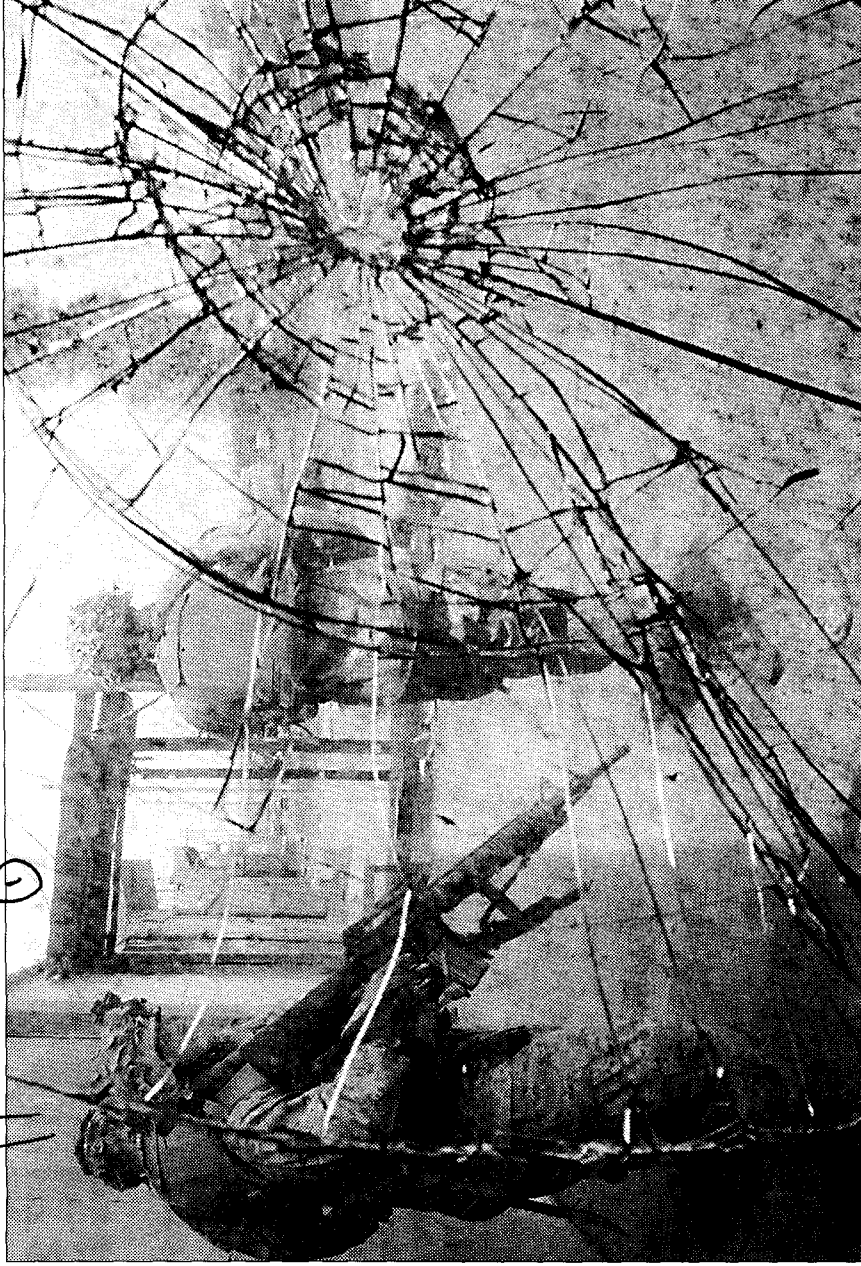
Associated Press
Baghdad, April 19

FALLUJAH'S CIVIC leaders joined American officials on Monday in calling for insurgents battling Marines here to surrender their heavy weapons in return for an end to the US siege of the city, according to a US spokesman.

The commitments appeared to be the first fruits of direct negotiations between US officials and a group of civic leaders and professions representing Fallujah residents. The joint statement also outlines promises to improve the humanitarian situation in the besieged city and to attempt a restoration of control in the city to Iraqi security forces, US spokesman Dan Senor said. Brig. Gen. Mark Kimmitt warned, however, that if the deal fell apart, Marines were prepared to attack and take the city quickly.

"It would appear there is an agreed political track," he told reporters. "There's also a very clear understanding ... that should this agreement not go through Marine forces are more than prepared to carry through with military operations" and could seize Fallujah "in fairly short order".

In the statement, all parties "call on citizens and groups to turn in all illegal weapons", Senor said.



AFP

US Marines appear behind a bullet-riddled window during a raid in Fallujah on Monday.

The agreements:

- Allow unfettered access to the city's hospital.
- Arrange for the removal and burial of the dead and the provision of food and

- medicine to isolated areas of the city.
- Relax the curfew, which would now begin at 9 p.m. instead of 7 p.m.
- Facilitate the passage of families a day, "commenc-

- ambulances through checkpoints.
- Consider "in due course" allowing civilians to enter the city, starting with 50 families a day, "commenc-

- To call on civilians to turn in illegal weapons
- To restore patrols in the city by US and Iraqi security forces.

Sadr rewards pullback Spain

Gr 9 2004 W Bina 09/11/04
Baghdad/Madrid, April 19
(Reuters): Radical Shia cleric Moqtada al-Sadr today called for a halt to attacks on Spanish troops in Iraq because Spain was pulling out of the US-led occupying coalition.

"The attacks on Spanish troops should be stopped since they are returning to their country and as long as they don't carry out aggressions against the Iraqi people," said a statement from Sadr's office in the southern city of Najaf.

Sadr's Mehdi Army militia has clashed with foreign troops in several Iraqi cities in recent weeks, including Spanish forces based around Najaf. The American military has vowed to capture or kill Sadr, who is wanted in connection with the murder of a moderate Iraqi cleric in Najaf, and destroy his militia.

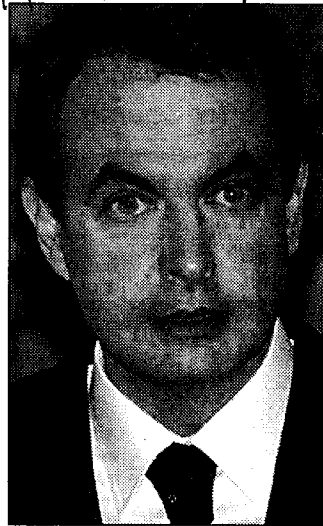
US forces poised outside Najaf said today they would allow time for talks before any attempt to enter the Iraqi holy city to seize Sadr — a move that could spark new unrest.

Spain's new government pledged today to remain at the forefront of the fight against international terrorism despite its surprise decision to pull the country's troops from Iraq as soon as possible.

However, defence minister Jose Bono announced that the process of withdrawing Spanish troops from Iraq has begun and will be completed quickly. "The process has started and will be completed rapidly."

He did not make clear if he meant Spanish troops were already starting to leave Iraq or simply that new Prime Minister Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero had started the process by giving the order to pull out the troops as soon as possible.

US President George W. Bush



**Spain's new Prime Minister
Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero.**
(Reuters)

expressed regret today to Zapatero, over his decision to withdraw 1,400 troops from Iraq and warned Madrid against taking further actions that could give "false comfort to terrorists", a White House spokesman said. The response from European capitals was muted with some policymakers expressing support or respect for Zapatero's move. Members of Zapatero's government defended the Socialist leader's decision, announced yesterday.

"That does not mean that Spain is giving up its commitment to the stability and democratisation of Iraq," foreign minister Miguel Angel Moratinos said in Madrid.

Bush picks Iraq envoy

Bush has tapped John Negroponte, the top American diplomat at the UN, to be his ambassador to Iraq after sovereignty is restored on June 30.

Najaf standoff talks stalled, Falluja calm

Abductors free two Japanese hostages

Baghdad, April 17 (Reuters): Kidnappers freed two Japanese hostages in Baghdad today, but the standoff in the southern city of Najaf showed no sign of easing and rebel cleric Moqtada al-Sadr's spokesman declared negotiations were stalled.

Guns fell silent in Falluja, west of Baghdad, where air strikes and clashes have punctuated a shaky truce, but a US spokesman said time was running out for talks aimed at ending fighting there between rebels and US Marines.

In Najaf, the Shia holy city where US troops are massing and Sadr and hundreds of militiamen are holed up, Sadr's spokesman said: "If the Americans attack Najaf this will be zero hour and mass revolution... a Shia-American confrontation."

US officials say Sadr, who is wanted in connection with the murder of a moderate Shia cleric a year ago, must not only face justice in an Iraqi court but also disband his forces.

The two Japanese, Jumpei Yasuda and Nobutaka Watanabe, were unshaven and looked tired but in good health as they were handed over to Japanese diplomats at Baghdad's Um al-Qura mosque.

Insurgents have seized more than 40 foreigners this month. Most have been released, though an Italian has been executed and his captors have threatened to kill three more taken with him unless Italian troops pull out of Iraq. Italy has refused and Arab television station al Jazeera broadcast an appeal from the families of the three others, begging for their lives to be spared.

"We are simple people like yourselves. We appeal to your religious consciences as believers," said Antonella Agliana, whose brother Maurizio is one of the three.

US President George W. Bush and British Prime Minister Tony Blair vowed in Washington yesterday to stamp out violence



Private Keith Maupin, seized after an attack on a road convoy west of Baghdad, on a videotape released by his captors to al Jazeera TV. (AP)

in Iraq, where US-led forces are battling guerrillas in Sunni central Iraq and trying to snuff out the revolt by Sadr's Shia militia in the south.

In mostly Sunni Falluja, a leading American official, Richard Jones, joined week-old peace talks with city leaders, senior US spokesman Dan Senor told a news conference.

"We are hopeful about their intentions," he said of the local leaders. "Our overriding question is can they deliver and, if so, can they do so expeditiously? Time is running out." One resident in the city of 300,000 said: "For the first time in days, Falluja is completely calm."

US Marines launched a crackdown in the city on April 5 after the gruesome killings of four American private security guards, ambushed in the town the previous week.

US officials want their killers brought to justice and the disarming of an estimated 1,000 to 2,000 fighters in Falluja, where they say foreign Islamist militants are also operating.

The captors of US Private Keith Maupin, seized after an attack on a road convoy west of Baghdad last week, released a videotape yesterday that showed him surrounded by masked gunmen.

Maupin, one of two missing US soldiers, identified himself in a soft voice on the videotape.

The two freed Japanese said they had been well treated during their three days of captivity. "We had a good meal every day," Yasuda said. "We were caught

around Abu Ghraib and after that we were blindfolded and changed house every day."

Three other Japanese were freed on Thursday, but several foreigners are still missing, including a US contractor, a Palestinian, a Dane, a Jordanian and the three Italians.

The climate of insecurity prompted the US military to close indefinitely highways One and Eight, north and south of Baghdad. It said guerrilla attacks had made them unsafe for civilian use, and they needed repairing.

Witnesses said insurgents had blown up at least two bridges over Highway Eight, running from Baghdad to Hilla and Basra in the south, closing the highway and further disrupting the battered transport system.

In Diwaniya, a Shia town east of Najaf where Spanish troops have clashed with Sadr's militiamen, heavy gunfire erupted this evening and witnesses said two military vehicles were ablaze.

Sadr is leading the insurgency in the south and 2,500 US soldiers are poised outside Najaf, vowing to kill or capture him and dismantle his militia, the Mehdi Army. About 200 supporters, including some wounded militiamen, filed into his office today to seek his blessing.

'Incurious' George revives a rare word

Los Angeles, April 17 (Reuters): "Incurious," a rarely used word, is making a curious comeback as pundits dust it off to describe President George W. Bush's alleged lack of curiosity about intelligence reports prior to September 11, 2001, according to a California language expert.

Paul JJ Payack, founder of the Global Language Monitor, which tracks word usage on the web and elsewhere, said that since he first spotted it used in a March Time magazine report, it had appeared some 5,000 times, jumping about 1,000 uses after the *New York Times* lead editorial on Thursday was headlined: "The Price of Incuriosity."

"Americans knew George W. Bush was incurious man when they elected him, but the hearings of the 9/11 commission, which turned yesterday (Wednesday) from the FBI's fecklessness to the CIA's blurred vision, have brought that fact home in a startling way," the *Times* said.

Other newspapers and several columnists have also used "incurious," a word Payack says made its first appearance in the 16th century, to describe the President. Part of the reason may lie in its having a punning quality — calling the President "Incurious George" in headlines conjures up visions of the popular children's book monkey "Curious George."

Payack said the term "incuriosity" has rocketed to the top of the Global Language Monitor's PQ (Political-sensitivity Quotient) Index, which is an algorithm that tracks politically sensitive words and phrases in the media. "Incuriosity" is followed by "quagmire," "two Americas," and "global outsourcing".

Washington, April 17: Bob Woodward, the investigative journalist-turned-author who helped bring down Richard Nixon after the Watergate break-in, has done it again.

At his joint press conference with British Prime Minister Tony Blair yesterday, the White House correspondent of Associated Press stunned President George W. Bush and everyone else present with this question: "Mr President, did you ask secretary (of defence Donald) Rumsfeld to draw up war plans against Iraq in November, 2001, just as the military action was getting underway in Afghanistan? Why couldn't Iraq wait?"

A few hours earlier AP had obtained a copy of Woodward's new book, *Plan of Attack*, due to be released on Tuesday, in which Bush tells the author that he kept the Iraq war plans secret because "I knew what would happen if people thought we were developing a potential war plan for Iraq. It was such a high-stakes moment and... it would look like that I was anxious to go to war."

Woodward says in the book that Bush told Rumsfeld in November 2001, six weeks after US forces attacked Afghanistan, to prepare for war with Iraq. Worse, the President told Rumsfeld not to reveal his plans to CIA director George Tenet and National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice was not told all the details of what Bush and his defence secretary were cooking up.

Yesterday, Bush fumbled for an answer to the question from the AP correspondent.

"You know, I can't remember exact dates that far back. I do know this, that at a key meeting at Camp David, the subject of Iraq — this was on September the..."

"Fifteenth", the correspondent helpfully reminded Bush.

"Fifteenth", Bush agreed, rather sheepishly.

"We had been attacked on September the 11th, obviously. On the 15th, we sat down, I sat down with my national security team to discuss the response,

Woodward book rattles Bush

and the subject of Iraq came up. And I said as plainly as I possibly could, we'll focus on Afghanistan... So I don't remember in times of — what was being developed or not being developed.

"But I do know that it was Afghanistan that was on my mind. And I didn't really start focusing on Iraq until later on..."

"I was asking you about November", the correspondent did not let go.

Bush said again: "I can't remember. I'd have to get back to you about a specific moment. But I can tell you, in September, I said, let us focus on Afghanistan, let us make sure that we do this job and do it well".

Woodward's book promises to be a hot potato for Bush, who is already on the defensive on Iraq.

Polls show popular disapproval of his handling of Iraq rising week after week and his former treasury secretary as well as his former counter-ter-

rorism chief have both said in recently published books that Bush was obsessed with Iraq when he should have been concentrating on Afghanistan and Osama bin Laden.

The Washington Post, where Woodward is assistant managing editor, today began publishing excerpts from the book, which chronicles strains in the relations between secretary of state Colin Powell and Vice-President Dick Cheney over Iraq to the point where they are no longer on speaking terms.

Asked about this at his daily briefing yesterday, state department spokesman Richard Boucher was not convincing when he weakly replied that "I think that is not true".

Woodward says Powell refers to under-secretary for defence policy Douglas Feith's role in the administration as "Gestapo" office and believes Feith, Cheney and the Vice-President's two aides, Paul Wolfowitz and Lewis Libby run a parallel US

government.

According to the book, Powell prophetically told Bush before the war that if he sent US troops there "you are going to be owning this place... You break it, you own it."

An alarming revelation by Woodward is that Bush himself found the case that Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction (WMD) — the main reason for going into Iraq — less than convincing. On December 21, 2002, the CIA's deputy director John McLaughlin made a presentation at the White House about Iraq's WMD using communications intercepts, satellite photos and other classified data.

"Nice try," Bush said rather dismissively of the evidence presented to him.

"I don't think this quite — it's not something that Joe Public would understand or would gain a lot of confidence from... I have been told all this intelligence about having WMD, and this is the best we have got?"

Woodward says General Tommy Franks, then head of the US army's Central Command, uttered a string of obscenities when he was told to prepare a plan to fight in Iraq even as he was battling the Taliban and al Qaida in Afghanistan.

Bush signals support for UN on interim Iraqi govt

Associated Press

WASHINGTON, April 16. — US President Mr George W. Bush today signalled support for an interim government to take power in Iraq on 30 June, saying the plan under development by a UN envoy is "broadly acceptable to the Iraqi people."

The authority of the coalition backed by the United States will expire on the 30 June deadline previously set, Mr Bush said during a news conference with British Prime Minister Mr Tony Blair, adding that "coalition forces will remain in Iraq to help the new government succeed."

Turning his attention to a second contentious foreign policy issue, Mr Bush called on Palestinian leaders to "rise to the challenge" of accepting permanent Israeli possession of certain portions of the West Bank seized in the 1967 Mideast War. "It gives all sides a chance to reinvigorate" the

peace process, said Mr Bush, who signed off earlier this week on a fundamental shift in American policy in response to a request from Israeli Prime Minister Mr Ariel Sharon.

The President made his comments in the sun-splashed White House Rose Garden, standing shoulder to shoulder once more with Mr Blair, his principal ally in the effort to topple Saddam Hussein. "It was never going to be easy and it isn't now" in Iraq, said Mr Blair, who echoed Mr Bush's comments, and also his resolve.

It was the fifth time in less than a week that Mr Bush has met with reporters — a period marked by increased American casualties in Iraq as well as a rash of hostage-taking by militants. He opened by saying the 30 June deadline for a turnover of political power in Iraq was firm, and expressing support for the work of United Nations envoy Mr Lakhdar Brahimi. "No citizen of America or Britain would want their

government in the hands of others and neither do the Iraqis and this is why the date for the transfer of sovereignty will be kept," he asserted.

Mr Bush added that the United States has "no interest in occupation. On that date the Coalition Provisional Authority will cease to exist. But coalition forces will remain in Iraq to help the new government succeed."

He revealed that Mr Brahimi has "identified a way forward to establishing an interim government that is broadly acceptable to the Iraqi people. Our coalition will continue to work with the United Nations to prepare for nationwide elections that will choose a new government in January 2005." As for the Middle East, Mr Bush said that his embrace of the Israeli Prime Minister's proposal for Israel to withdraw from all of Gaza but retain parts of the West Bank, where thousands of Israeli set-

tlers live, marks an opportunity for a final agreement leading to a Palestinian state. Mr Blair reiterated the same, adding, "Let's not look this particular opportunity in the eye and then turn away." The British Prime Minister added there was now an agreement "that a Palestinian state should be viable."

USA, Fallujah leaders open talks

US officials today met with leaders from Fallujah in the first known direct negotiations since the siege of the city began 12 days ago.

Eleven members of the Iraqi delegation attended the talks, most wearing business suits, but one member attended wearing traditional robes. The Iraqi delegates asked that their names not be released and that no pictures be taken of them for fear of reprisals by militants.

US officials refused to comment on the substance of the negotiations.

US citizen kidnapped in Basra

BASRA, April 16. — An US businessman was abducted from his hotel in the southern city of Basra by kidnappers disguised as policemen, Basra police chief said today. Col Khalaf al-Maleki said the abduction of the American, who was of Jordanian origin, took place last night. He had no further details.

The kidnapped American is the owner of a security company that provides bodyguards, the owner of the al-Rashid hotel, where the American was staying, said.

Incidentally, a Danish businessman is also feared kidnapped in Iraq, the Danish foreign ministry said in Copenhagen today. "No Iraqi groups have contacted Danish authorities. The foreign ministry has in close cooperation with the family of the person concerned, contacted relevant authorities, including the (Iraqi) coalition provisional authority," it said in a statement. Danish public broadcaster DR reported on its website that the man, whose name was not disclosed, was kidnapped near the village of Al Ta-dij outside Baghdad. — AP/AFP

US runs into defiance and clash



A girl is carried to safety in Kufa, near Najaf, after she was wounded in a crossfire between US forces and the Mehdi Army militia of Moqtada al-Sadr. (Reuters)

Kufa (Iraq), April 16 (Reuters): Shia guerrillas clashed with US troops near Kufa today as their leader, rebel cleric Moqtada al-Sadr, defied demands that he disband his militia to spare Iraq's shrine cities from bloodshed.

A Syrian-born Canadian aid worker kidnapped on April 8 was brought to Sadr's office in the nearby city of Najaf and set free after the fiery cleric urged the release of foreigners not involved in the US-led occupation.

"At first (the kidnapers) beat me, then they kept moving me to different locations every few hours," Padi Ihsan Padel said at Sadr's office, shortly after arriving.

Sadr, who launched a Shia uprising this month against the US-led occupation of Iraq, is holed up in Najaf with US forces poised outside vowing to kill or capture him.

The Czech foreign ministry said three Czech journalists had also been freed. "They are alive, healthy and are in good physical... condition at the Czech embassy in Baghdad," foreign ministry spokesman Vit Kolar said.

Three freed Japanese hostages flew from Iraq to Dubai earlier today, but two Japanese remained missing, along with other foreigners seized in a spate of kidnappings this month.

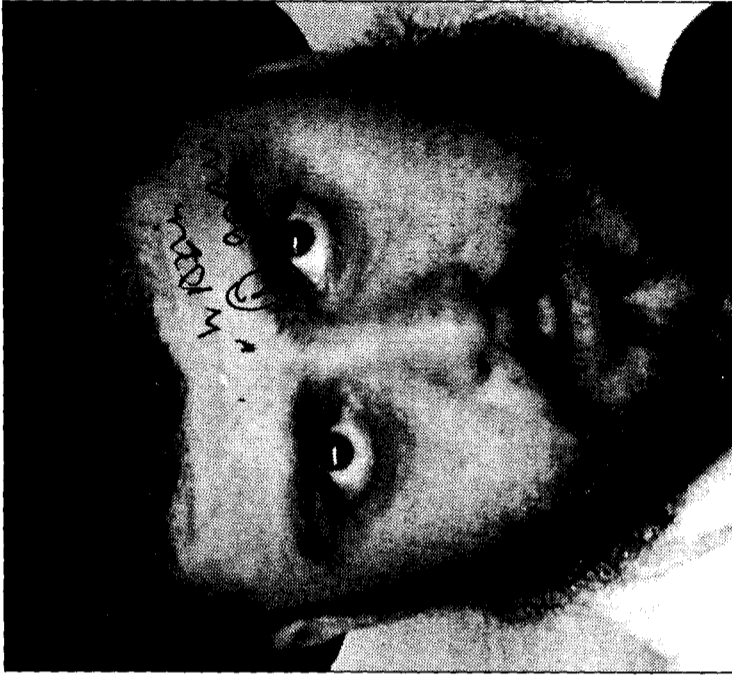
A Danish businessman joined the hostage list. Danish media said he was probably seized during a highway robbery on Tuesday night, in Taji, north of Baghdad.

Blasts shook Kufa, where Sadr was preaching in the main mosque, and his militiamen said they ambushed a US convoy. Hospital sources said at least five people were killed and 20 wounded in Kufa.

The US military said eight Iraqis were killed and 17 wounded in the northern city of Mosul when mortar bombs fired by guerrillas missed their targets — a US base and a police station — last night.

In other violence in Iraq, US troops fought Sunni guerrillas in

Sadr refuses to disband militia



Moqtada Al-Sadr during prayers in Kufa, near Najaf. (Reuters)

troops near Najaf, says the Sadr's Mehdi Army must be disbanded or destroyed, but they have allowed Shia clerics and an Iranian envoy to mediate.

America's top general said yesterday Falluja truce talks could not go on forever. But Richard Myers, chairman of the joint chiefs of staff, said US officials were using "multiple channels" to pacify Falluja and avoid fighting in Najaf.

Defiant at Friday prayers, Sadr said he would not disband his militia under any circumstances "because I did not create it on my own but with the cooperation of the Iraqi people".

The US military, with 2,500 troops near Najaf, says the Sadr's Mehdi Army must be disbanded or destroyed, but they have allowed Shia clerics and an Iranian envoy to mediate.

Sadeghi met officials of the US-led authority on Wednesday. Iran said his mission would go on even after an Iranian diplomat was shot dead in Baghdad yesterday. There was no sign military action was imminent in Najaf, home to some of Shia Islam's holiest shrines. Any attack in Najaf could inflame Iraq's Shia majority whose support is vital to US plans for the country's political future.

Lebanon's top Shia cleric said Washington would fan fury across the Muslim world if it invaded Najaf or attacked Sadr.

"All of this will set the ground burning beneath their feet, not just in Iraq, but in the whole of the Islamic world," Grand Ayatollah Mohammad Hussein Fadlallah said in a sermon.

Tens of thousands of Shias chanted support for Sadr in his main power base, the Baghdad slum district of Sadr City. "You Americans, do not fall into a quagmire and storm Najaf. Rivers of your blood will flow," Sheikh Nasser al-Saedi told the ecstatic crowd thronging streets around a mosque.

"I saw at least two Humvees on fire and we also attacked armoured personnel carriers," said one fighter in Kufa. "We attacked them again, but then they started mortaring our position so we had to retreat," said the man, dressed in the Mehdi Army's black uniform, as smoke rose above the town and militiamen tried to evacuate wounded fighters across a bridge.

In Karbala, another holy city where Sadr's followers are in control, three Iraqi policemen were killed in clashes with Shia militiamen today, witnesses said. US Marines began an assault on Falluja, west of Baghdad, on April 5 after the killing and mutilation of four US private security guards in the city the previous week. Doctors say more than 600 Iraqis have died in fighting in Falluja since then.

A week ago, the US military said it had suspended offensive operations in Falluja but would hit back if attacked. Talks to stabilise a shaky truce have led to relative calm interspersed with fighting and air strikes.

At Baghdad airport, 118 people, mostly from Russia and Ukraine, boarded a plane sent from Russia to evacuate them. It was the second day of an evacuation organised after the kidnapping and release of eight Russians and Ukrainians this week.

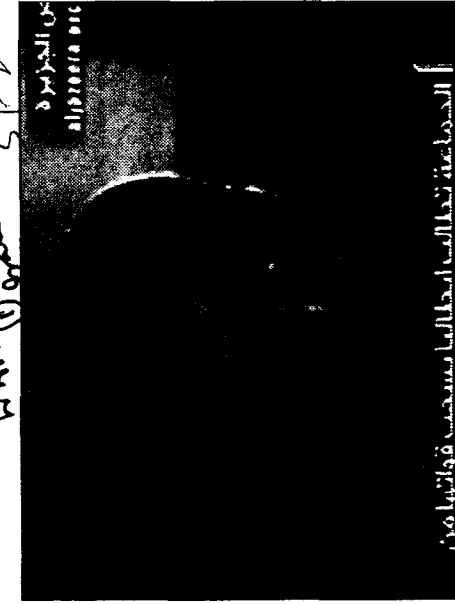
Italian hostage slain in Iraq, 3 Japanese released

Agency France Presse

BAGHDAD, April 15 — One of four Italian hostages being held in Iraq has been killed, Italian Foreign Minister Franco Frattini announced early today, while Japanese officials tried to confirm reports that two more of their nationals had been abducted.

Journalist Alexandre Jordanov, who was taken hostage south of Baghdad 3 days ago, was freed, a French diplomat said. But that left about 40 other foreigners still being held hostage amid a wave of kidnappings.

In a statement sent to Arab satellite channel Al-Jazeera, the captors of the



A TV grab taken on 13 April from the Al-Jazeera channel shows Italian hostage Fabrizio Quattrocchi. — AFP

Italians said they had "killed the hostage after comments by (Italian Prime Minister Silvio) Berlusconi ... that the withdrawal of Italian troops from Iraq was not negotiable." Al-Jazeera said it had received a "video film and photos showing the murder of the hostage" but said it could not broadcast

Chalabi says Iraqis tired of occupation

WASHINGTON, April 15. — Ahmad Chalabi, acting President of the US-appointed Iraqi Governing Council, today said that a year after Saddam Hussein was deposed, the Iraqi people are "grateful for the liberation but tired of occupation and delayed promises." "Only sovereignty, democracy and justice will satisfy us now," he said in an article in the Wall Street Journal. — PTI

the material for fear of upsetting its viewers. Mr Frattini named the dead hostage as Fabrizio Quattrocchi, 35, from Genoa. The kidnappers threat-



An Al-Jazeera grab shows Japanese hostages, Nahoko Takato and Noriaki Imai after their release in Baghdad on Thursday. — AFP

ened to kill the other three hostages "one by one if their demands were not taken into account," Al-Jazeera said. Mr Berlusconi, had said Tuesday

Democratic Party of Japan, speaking in Amman, said of the two Japanese kidnapped one was freelance journalist Junpei Yasuda and the other man's family name was Watanabe.

Three Iraqis were killed and two injured in US bombardment today near Baquba, north of Baghdad. **Japanese hostages released:** Three Japanese held hostage in Iraq were released today in Baghdad, Sheikh Abdul Salam Kubaissi, an official at the Committee of Muslim Scholars told AFP. Japan's government confirmed that at volunteer workers Noriaki Imai, 18, Nahoko Takato, 34, and photojournalist Soichiro Koriyama, 32, were released.

Panel slams CIA for failing to anticipate 9/11

WASHINGTON, April 15. — The independent commission probing the terror attacks of 11 September 2001 has slammed US intelligence agencies for their alleged failure to anticipate the strikes on New York and Washington despite warnings. The interim report by the Commission offered a stinging assessment of the CIA under Tenet's leadership and was made public during a hearing at which Tenet said he had little contact with President George W. Bush during 2001, when intelligence agencies were warning of a terrorist threat. — PTI

Cleric cries truce in Najaf

Reuters
Near Najaf (Iraq), April 14

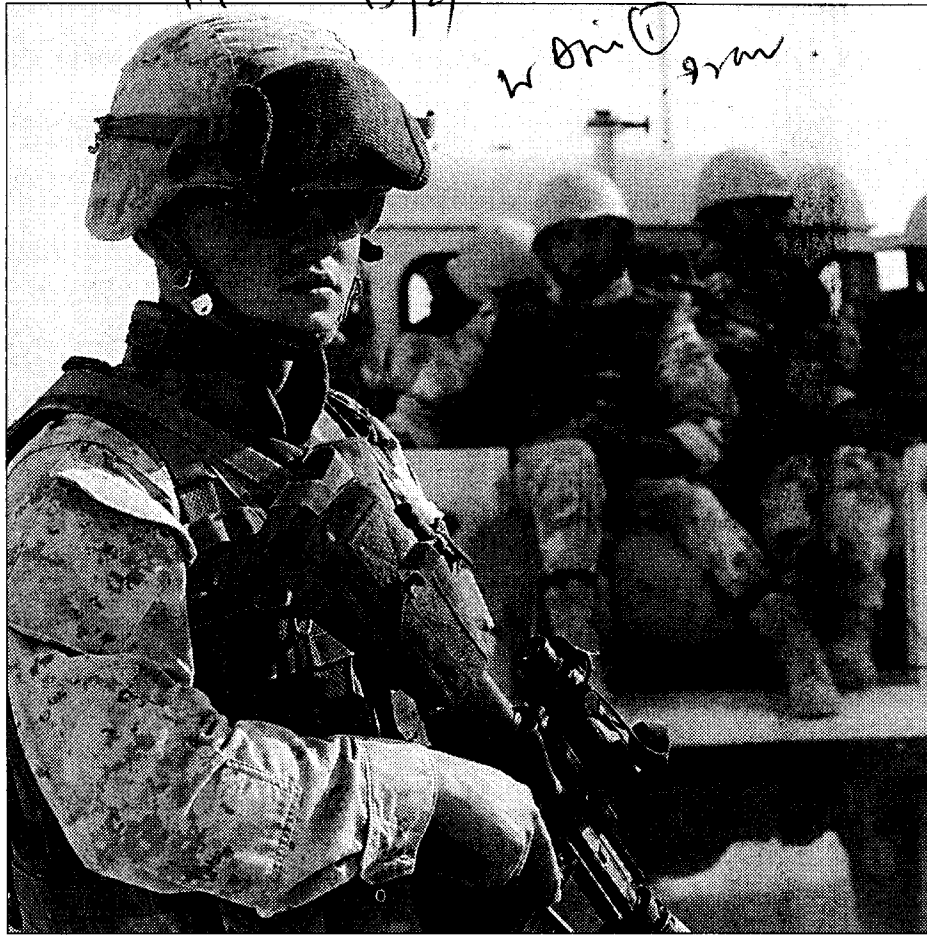
US FORCES tightened their grip around one of Iraq's holiest cities Wednesday, and the rebel Shia cleric they have vowed to kill or capture offered peace terms to spare Najaf a bloodbath. A 2,500-strong US force massed on the outskirts of Najaf for a showdown with the radical cleric, raising fears of a US attack on the city that would outrage the nation's relatively pro-US Shia majority.

An envoy appointed by Muqtada al-Sadr, meanwhile, said the wanted cleric had asked him to convey peace proposals to the Americans.

Meanwhile, Russia said it would airlift out of Iraq more than 800 of its nationals and citizens of ex-Soviet states to escape a hostage free-for-all and worsening violence sweeping Iraq. Russia's Emergencies Ministry said seven flights from Kuwait and Baghdad would take 553 Russians and 263 nationals of former Soviet states out of Iraq later this week, despite the safe release of three Russian and five Ukrainian hostages on Tuesday.

The 2,500-strong 3rd Brigade Task Force, along with Spanish and Polish troops, set up what US officers called an exclusion zone around Najaf and sent out reconnaissance patrols from Forward Operating Base Duke, 13 miles west of the city. The Najaf build-up was proceeding hours after President Bush vowed to stay the course in Iraq and said a June 30 handover to Iraqi sovereignty would go ahead.

"Sayyed Muqtada made positive proposals to end the crisis. I can't disclose the details. He realizes an armed confrontation is not in anybody's interest", Sadr's envoy, Abdelkarim al-Anzi, now in Baghdad, said over telephone. Anzi said he had met Sadr in Najaf on Tuesday. The US military has branded Sadr an outlaw and pledged to kill or capture the cleric, who has taken refuge near Najaf's Imam



Iraqi Army soldiers pass a US Marine on the outskirts of Fallujah on Wednesday.

AFF

Baghdad, where US soldiers fired on looters raiding a military truck previously ambushed on the airport road. A photographer said he saw several Iraqis lying motionless and bleeding after the shooting. Four people were killed and six wounded in the northern city of Mosul when a Katyusha rocket, aimed at a police station, hit a civilian area, police and hospital officials said.

Tension was also running high in Najaf's sister city of Karbala, where residents said the streets were empty amid fears of clashes between Sadr's militia and US-led forces. Bulgaria said its troops in the shrine city had come under fire during the night. They took no casualties in the attacks on a patrol and on their base, the Defence Ministry in Sofia said.

Bush said his generals, who have asked for two more brigades — about 10,000 troops — to be sent to Iraq, would get them. At a rare White House news conference, Bush called on Sadr to disband his militia, which launched an uprising this month after US-led authorities closed the cleric's newspaper, said he was wanted for murder and detained his top aide.

Recovered bodies may be of Americans

FOUR BODIES have been found in Iraq, possibly the remains of private contractors missing since an assault on their convoy outside Baghdad amid a wave of kidnappings of at least 22 foreigners in Iraq.

A State Department official yesterday confirmed the discovery of the bodies, but the private contractor Halliburton said it did not know whether the dead were its missing employees. Initial reports said the four bodies were mutilated, but those re-

ports were not confirmed, the official said.

Two US soldiers and seven employees of Halliburton subsidiary Kellogg, Brown and Root have been missing since their convoy was attacked Friday on the main highway west of Baghdad, between the district of Abu Ghraib and Fallujah.

The roads west of Baghdad have been a site of many of the kidnappings since bloody fighting broke out across Iraq this month. Some abductions have

also occurred in the south. The most recent reported abductions were of four Italian security guards working for a US-based company and a French TV journalist.

A US spokesman said 40 foreigners from 12 countries were currently held by kidnappers — though an AP count put the number at 22. The State Department official, speaking only on condition of anonymity, said the four bodies had not yet been identified.

AP, Washington

Fallujah negotiations

US warplanes and helicopter gunships firing heavy machineguns, rockets and cannons hammered gunmen as a truce in besieged Fallujah was strained by increasingly intense battles. A US Cobra attack helicopter fired rockets and heavy machineguns before dawn Wednesday at gunmen gathered on the northern edge of the city of Fallujah.

Rocket-propelled grenades arched up from the ground toward the helicopter and a second gunship providing support, but none apparently hit the gunships. With the announcement of the deaths of four more Marines, April became the deadliest month for the US military in Iraq.

Ali shrine, sacred to the world's Shia Muslims. As tension mounted in Najaf,

Iraqi mediators said they had extended a shaky truce in the embattled Sunni town

of Fallujah for 48 hours from 9 am on Wednesday. But violence flared in

Seven abducted Chinese freed

China Daily/ANN & Agencies

BEIJING, BAGHDAD, April 13. — Seven Chinese kidnapped in Fallujah have been released, according to Xinhua news agency and the Arabic satellite channel on *Al Jazeera*. Five Ukrainian and three Russian employees of a Russian energy company who were kidnapped in Iraq were also freed today, the Russian foreign ministry said.

Television image aired by *Al Jazeera* shows Chinese hostages released to an Iraqi Sunni Muslim clerical body which then handed them over to Chinese diplomats. The station aired footage showing at least six of the men, one with a bandaged forehead, sitting in a room as a first secretary of the Chinese embassy in Iraq expressed thanks and joy at their release.

Xinhua said two of the captives had been slightly injured in a traffic accident, but did not elaborate. China's ambassador to Iraq, Mr Sun Bigan, told Xinhua the hostages were all safe.

Al Jazeera's footage also showed a cleric representing the Association of Islamic Clerics, Abdul-Salam al-Kubaisi, saying the detainees had been handed over to him at a mosque.

Xinhua earlier quoted Mr Chen Xianzhong, a Chinese merchant in Baghdad, as saying the association had taken care of the seven at

a "secret place" after their release late yesterday.

Eight Ukrainian and Russian employees of a Russian energy company who were kidnapped in Iraq were also freed today.

"As a result of the efforts made during the past hours by the Russian side, all the specialists of Interenergoversis who were abducted on the evening of 12 April have been released," the ministry said. It said the captives had returned to their residence in Baghdad and none had been hurt.

The Interenergoversis workers were seized from their residence yesterday. The Russian foreign ministry spokesman said no one had claimed responsibility for the kidnapping.

In Tokyo, Prime Minister Mr Junichiro Koizumi said his government still had no clear information about the abducted Japanese, but repeated his refusal to bow to the kidnappers' demands that Japan withdraw its 550 troops in Iraq.

"We are still not able to confirm the facts," Mr Koizumi told reporters. "I would like to do anything to rescue those three safely."

Three Czech journalists have not been seen since they were reported snatched, also at gunpoint, from a taxi as they attempted to make their way out of Iraq to Jordan on Sunday.

Four Italian private security guards working for DTS, a US company went missing in Iraq,



The seven released Chinese with two Chinese diplomats (second from right) and (extreme left), and Sheikh Abdul Salam al-Kubaisi (centre) at a mosque in Baghdad on Monday. — AFP

Italian officials confirmed today, as *Al-Jazeera* television showed footage of what it said were the hostages.

A French journalist, has been taken hostage in Iraq, the French foreign ministry said today. The kidnapping comes just hours after France urged its citizens today to leave Iraq. Alexandre Jordanov, who works for Capa Television in Paris, disappeared on the road between Baghdad and Karbala on Sunday, according to a colleague.

'Capture or kill' order for Shi'ite cleric: The top US commander in Iraq, Lt. Gen. Ricardo Sanchez, has ordered his troops to "capture

or kill" Shi'ite cleric Moqtada al Sadr "if they can find him."

The remark "if they can find him" was surprising to observers. The cleric has been appearing daily on US television from his mosque in the Shia stronghold. Sadr's militia, called the Mahdi Army, has evacuated Kut and Hillah but still control the Shi'ite holy cities of Najaf and Karbala.

Al Sadr is wanted for the murder of another Shi'ite cleric. The arrest warrant has been issued by an Iraqi judge and endorsed by the American occupation authority which alone can carry out that order.

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A MASS UPRISING

west drive (D)

THE IRAQIS HAVE risen *en masse* against the neo-colonial occupation of their country by the United States and its smattering of allies. Washington deceives itself and seeks to deceive the world when it claims that the forces of the occupation are dealing only with small groups of miscreants who are determined to thwart the democratic aspirations of an Iraqi majority. In its hubris the Bush administration refuses to acknowledge the reality that an overwhelmingly large proportion of the Iraqi people sympathise with the resistance and provide assistance whenever able to do so. Even those who welcomed the ouster of the regime of Saddam Hussein and those who fear that conditions in the country will become chaotic if foreign troops depart have expressed their opposition to the occupation. Hearteningly, sectarian differences did not block the Iraqis from uniting behind a common cause. Shias collected and ferried food and medicines to Sunnis besieged in the town of Falluja. Warriors belonging to both sects fought shoulder to shoulder, setting aside conflicts over the future leadership of their country. The quiescent Governing Council set up by the neo-colonial powers has begun to unravel; its members denounced the brutal methods used to suppress the resistance and the security forces under its command melted away whenever they were confronted by the masses. The solidarity demonstrated by the Iraqi people as they fiercely fight for freedom is all the more remarkable since they do not have a united leadership.

The chief occupying power, which has a huge military advantage, might eventually prevail in the current phase of fighting and reconquer the four or five towns that have fallen to the resistance. However, any success will prove to be ephemeral. The hatred the Iraqi masses feel towards the forces of the occupation has only grown on account of the death and destruction

caused by the use of armour and air power in populated areas. Hospitals, mosques and private residences have been shelled and bombed. Over 400 Iraqis, most of them civilians, are estimated to have died in Falluja alone as U.S. Marines tried to bludgeon a path to the city centre. The guerrilla war that has been waged since the inception of the occupation will only intensify with the people of the country determined to avenge these deaths. The occupation forces will be hard-pressed to protect lines of communication to Kuwait in the South and Jordan in the West and their supply columns will be constantly under the threat of attack. Civilian expatriates working for the occupation, including mercenaries who masquerade as security guards, will be particularly vulnerable. The resistance has abducted the citizens of nearly half a dozen countries with the aim of forcing the governments concerned to withdraw their support for the occupation.

America's much-touted "alliance" is a shambles. The military units contributed by these so-called allies were either too small or too ill trained to be effective. Kazakhstan's minuscule contingent will not be replaced when its tour of duty ends next month. The Italian and Japanese Governments are under pressure from the families of the kidnapped. Even the United Kingdom has finally found its voice and officially expressed the opinion that the resistance is more broad-based than the U.S. is willing to acknowledge. A plan to transfer power, in form though not in substance, to an interim Iraqi government by the end of June is in jeopardy. The United Nations, which has been asked to assist in this exercise, will not be able to hold the wide consultations that it has promised since Iraq is in turmoil. The superpower is stuck in a desperate situation since it cannot either advance towards its political objectives or retreat from the country it invaded.

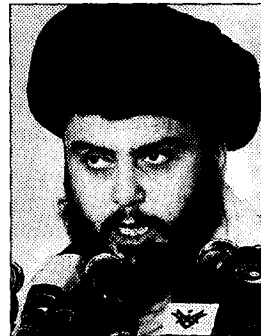


An Iraqi militant with a rocket launcher, left, fires at US forces in Fallujah on Thursday

Shiite unrest spells trouble for US forces

By Jai Taraporevala
TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Mumbai: The growing challenge posed to the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) in Iraq by the Mehdi Army, the radical Shiite militia of Muqtada al-Sadr, has potentially serious consequences for Washington.



Muqtada al-Sadr

The discontent among a substantial section of Iraqi Shiites (Shias constitute around 60 per cent of the country's population) is a reflection of continuing economic and security problems and a perception that the interim constitution has granted too many concessions to the Kurds and Sunnis.

This being so, SCIRI, the largest Shiite party in the country, could adopt a tougher stand towards the CPA in an attempt to prevent al-Sadr's militia from further consolidating its social base in southern Iraq.

In particular, SCIRI and Ayatollah Ali Sistani, the leading Shiite cleric in the country, are likely to step up their calls for the process of forming a transitional government to be made open and accountable — thus complicating the CPA's plans to transfer sovereignty to an Iraqi administration at the end of June.

Besides, the unrest in some Shiite areas of Iraq will make it difficult for the CPA to depict the militant challenge it faces as a pro-Saddam Sunni insurgency and place additional pressure on its already strained military resources.

Moreover, recent events could exacerbate ethnic tensions in the country in the medium-term. For instance, rising Shiite assertiveness coupled with aggressive US counter-insurgency operations around Fallujah could stoke the flames of militancy in the Sunni Triangle.

The ongoing developments will also prompt the two main Kurdish groups, the KDP and PUK, to intensify their demand for the institutionalisation of a far-reaching federal arrangement in Iraq. This, in turn, will be firmly opposed by the other ethnic groups in Iraq and further fuel concerns in Iran and Turkey about the prospect of Kurdish nationalism.

Iraqi minister resigns

Baghdad: Iraqi Interior Minister Nouri Badran said on Thursday that he had resigned, adding he had heard that the US-led administration was unhappy with his performance and wanted a different religious mix in the cabinet.

Badran, a Shiite Muslim, told a news conference that he had been told that the US-led administration thought the defence minister and interior minister should not both be Shiite. A new defence minister's position was created this month, and filled by a Shiite official.

There was no immediate comment from the US-led administration.

An uprising by members of a radical Shiite militia has swept across Iraq this week, and deadly clashes have erupted with foreign troops in several Shiite areas. Reuters

Shiite rebels control 2 Iraqi towns

Baghdad: US troops fought Sunni and Shiite rebels in the Iraqi towns of Fallujah and Kerbala on Thursday as hospital officials reported hundreds of casualties in the heaviest fighting since Saddam Hussein's fall a year ago.

The Arabic television station Al Jazeera aired a video showing three Japanese, including one woman, who it said had been taken hostage by an Iraqi group vowing to kill them if Japan did not pull its troops out of Iraq.

The top US general in Iraq acknowledged that the southern towns of Najaf and Kut were in the hands of a radical Shiite militia but vowed they would be retaken and the militia would be destroyed.

"We have got Fallujah under siege," Lieutenant General Ricardo Sanchez told a news conference. He denied that US forces were depriving its people of humanitarian supplies.

Reuters television footage showed three bodies covered in blankets lying in an alleyway in Fallujah.

Up to 300 Iraqis have been killed and at least 400 hurt in the Sunni town in the four days since US Marines began a crackdown on guerrillas, hospital director Rafi Hayad said.

The Marines launched Operation Iron Resolve after the killing and mutilation of four US private security guards last week that showed the depth of anti-

American hatred in Fallujah.

South of Baghdad, Polish and Bulgarian troops battled followers of the radical Shiite cleric Muqtada al-Sadr in the shrine city of Kerbala, where hundreds of thousands of pilgrims have converged for Arbain, a major Shiite religious occasion.

Sanchez said Sadr's Mehdi Army militia controlled the centres of Najaf and Kut, along with police stations and public buildings, while coalition troops held bases outside the towns.

Asked if US troops would be sent to fight the Mehdi Army, he said: "We will do whatever is necessary to defeat Muqtada Sadr's forces, wherever they are on the battlefield".

This week's intense two-front fighting has killed 35 American and allied soldiers and hundreds of Iraqis. It has elicited US assertions of resolve, but prompted signs of nervousness among some other countries with troops in Iraq.

Al Jazeera television said a statement it had received from a hitherto unknown Iraqi group, Saraya al-Mujahideen, had given Japan three days from the airing of the video to withdraw its troops from Iraq before the three Japanese hostages were killed.

The hostages were shown wearing civilian clothes. At least one of them had a press identification card. Agencies

Iraq rebels take 7 Chinese hostage in new twist

The Guardian
Monday April 12

THE INTERNATIONAL hostage crisis in Iraq on Monday intensified further as seven Chinese nationals were taken by gunmen and there was mounting uncertainty over the fate of the three kidnapped Japanese civilians. The seven had entered Iraq through Jordan on Sunday and were driving to Baghdad when they were taken hostage near Fallujah. The town — the scene of weeklong fighting between the US troops and insurgents — lies on the main road to the Iraqi capital.

Those abducted are aged between 18 and 49, according to state media in China. Beijing has said the men are not working for the government, but it is possible they are employed by one of the 10 Chinese companies in Iraq.

Fallujah, itself, was on Monday quiet and, despite gunfire, explosions and the sound of US helicopters heard on Sunday night, it appeared that the fragile ceasefire was holding. Residents took advantage of the lull in the fighting to bury their dead in football fields.

The US military has laid siege to Fallujah for a week, blocking roads in and out of the town and sending in battalions. Several marines and 600 Iraqis have been killed: US commanders claim that 95 per cent of those dead were legitimate targets. It has threatened to launch an all-out assault on the town if talks between pro-US Iraqi politicians and city officials fall through. The kidnapping of the seven Chinese followed the seizure of three Japanese nationals last week near Fallujah, who are threatened with execution if Japan does not withdraw its peacekeeping troops from Iraq.

Optimism that the group,



REUTERS
An American soldier stands near a burning military truck after it was attacked on Baghdad's airport highway on Monday.

including an 18-year-old aid worker, would be quickly released on Monday evaporated when a government spokesman backtracked on an earlier statement and said Tokyo was no longer confident about their safety. "At one point, we were able to make the judgment from various perspectives that they were safe, but now that's unconfirmed", chief Cabinet secretary Yasuo Fukuda said.

Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi on Monday refused to pull out his troops and insisted officials were working to release the three. US Vice-President Dick Cheney, who is visiting Japan, praised Koizumi and warned that giving in to pressure would only encourage more hostage-taking. The fate of an American hostage, Thomas Hamill, is still unknown.

UK captive freed, back with allies

The Guardian
London, April 12

THE FAMILY of the British civilian contractor taken hostage by militants in the southern Iraqi city of Nasiriyah a week ago was on Sunday celebrating news of his release. Gary Teeley, who ran laundry services for a US military base, was handed back to the American and Italian coalition forces in Nasiriyah. The Foreign Office confirmed that he was "safe and well".

Teeley, who turned 37 during his time as a hostage, is expected to return to Britain in the next few days. "He is in the hands of American and Italian forces in Nasiriyah", a coalition spokesman said. "We'll be making sure he's flown out of the country as soon as possible".

Asked about his condition, the coalition spokesman said: "He's all right". Teeley was thought to have been held by Shia militias loyal to the cleric Moqtada al-Sadr. There was no confirmation about how he was handed over.

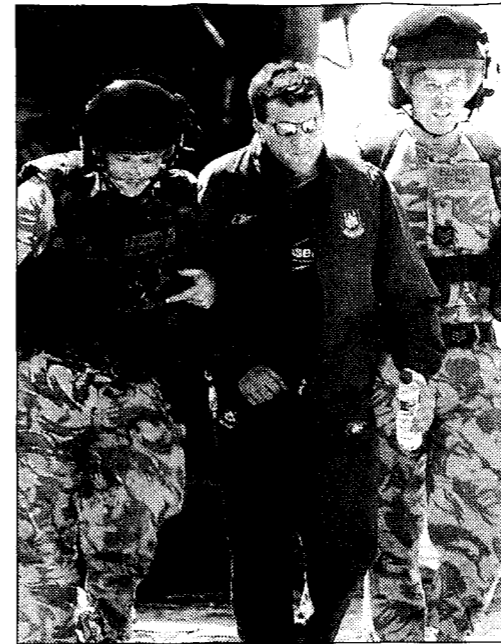
Teeley, a father of five, had worked elsewhere in West Asia before going to Iraq. Originally from Woolwich, south-east London, he had worked for a laundry company in Wellingborough.

His contract in Iraq was believed to be with a Qatari firm, which worked for a US airbase near Nasiriyah.

His cousin, Terry, on Sunday night, said: "(It) has still not sunk in at the moment. I'm just grinning from ear to ear."

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OUT OF DANGER, AND INTO IT



REUTERS/AP

Released British hostage Gary Teeley (centre) flanked by British soldiers at an army base in Iraq on Monday and relatives of Albanian commandos before their departure to Iraq, at Tirana airport on Monday (right).

US dithers between guns 'n' talks

FROM AN all-out military drive to the "political track", from a manageable insurgency to a "crisis", the US line on Iraq has shifted significantly amid deepening turmoil on the ground.

Facing stiff resistance from Iraqi insurgents and a spate of kidnappings of foreign civilians, even the upbeat US President George W. Bush conceded on Sunday the occupation had gone through a "tough week".

After days of fighting that left the Sunni Muslim bastion of Fallujah bloodied but unbowed and failed to tame a brash insurgency by

Evidence of suicide squads found

US MARINES have found evidence of suicide squads operating in the Iraqi city of Fallujah, a report said here. US troops found sacks full of chemical coated rocks, leather belts stuffed with explosive putty, boxes of batteries with wires taped to them and

instructions for making bombs in the abandoned factory. The debris provided clues to the identity and motives of the suicide squad that was preparing to fight with the 2,500 Marines who entered sections of the city a week ago. **PTI, Washington**

Shia radical militiamen, the coalition clearly switched tack over the weekend.

Absent were US threats to teach a lesson to the insur-

gents in Fallujah for the murders of four US contractors. Forgotten was overseer Paul Bremer's vow that "the military will now show

them we mean business". The new emphasis was on a ceasefire and negotiations. "We are now looking at the political track to restore government control," said Brig. Gen. Mark Kimmitt, the director of military operations. An Iraqi delegation, including members of the Governing Council, launched mediation efforts in the city where more than 600 Iraqis have been killed since last Monday. US officials agreed to the ceasefire at the behest of their allies in Iraq who criticised the military operation.

AFP, Baghdad

Iraq's enemy within

By Haifa Zangana

AD-10
12/9

IN IRAQ we say: "Choose the companion first, then the road." We believe it very important to know who one is travelling with. On June 30 the United States-led occupation forces will hand power to an Iraqi Government. Iraqis would like to begin our journey towards a much-needed stability and democracy. But at the moment our "companions" are the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) and their appointed Iraqi Governing Council (IGC). We have not chosen them.

The governing council is as responsible as the U.S.-led occupation forces for Iraq's rapid slide into chaos and bloodshed. They stood aside last Sunday (April 4) when the Sadr City demonstration against the closure of a newspaper was machine-gunned from helicopters — 32 people were killed and hundreds injured. They stood aside when rockets were fired into the Shulla neighbourhood further north in Baghdad, with more casualties. They have been watching in silence while Iraqis have been killed in Basra, Nassiriya, Kirkuk, Amara, Baquba, Kut, Kerbala and Najaf.

It was left to journalists and organisations like Amnesty International and Occupation Watch to document and condemn hundreds of occupation excesses and outright atrocities, starting from the shooting of 17 civilians at a demonstration in Falluja in April last year.

While the IGC denounced the savage mutilation last week of four American mercenaries in Falluja, they failed to issue an equal condemnation of the U.S. marines' besieging of the town, sending tank columns into neighbourhoods, guns blazing, and attacking a mosque with F-16 planes, killing 40 people. The odd IGC member who could not hide from journalists does no more than murmur about the need for "restraint on both sides" or mouth well-

worn phrases about foreign hands trying to delay the handover of sovereignty to the Iraqi people. What sovereignty?

The 25-member IGC was appointed on the basis of their ethnic and sectarian backgrounds. The council had some power, but Paul Bremer, the U.S. administrator of Iraq, retained a veto on its decisions. The IGC appointed the Iraqi interim government based on a similar ethnic and sectarian quota. But American officials run all the ministries.

The CPA and IGC's early promises were colourful: they would build a new democratic Iraq, they said, guar-

things the CPA did was to issue a memorandum to remove the jurisdiction of Iraqi courts over any coalition personnel in both civil and criminal matters.

The CPA also ignores the violent activities of the four militias in Iraq, which have taken the law into their own hands: the peshmergas of the two Kurdish parties; the Badr brigade of the Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq; Ahmed Chalabi's troops; and the ex-Ba'athist Mukhabarats under Iyad Alawi's national accord. These militias are run by members of the IGC and no one can touch them. No high-ranking official

possible. Twelve hours later, he was killed. Al-Mayah, a former prisoner of Saddam's regime, was no Saddamist or Bin Ladenist. The CPA and IGC met his murder with silence — as they did the murder of at least 17 other Iraqi academics. With this silence, the oppressed becomes oppressor. The IGC has allied itself with the occupation administration. Its role is to shield occupation forces, not its own people. The gulf between it and the majority of Iraqis has widened. Away from the vulnerable majority, they stand well-protected by bodyguards driving special cars and carrying free mobile phones courtesy of the U.S.

The interim constitution was written behind closed doors. Iraqis were not consulted, but Paul Bremer and Jeremy Greenstock, the British Ambassador, were. As the countdown to the supposed end of the occupation begins, Mr. Bremer has already announced measures and laws that will in effect thwart a new government from overturning his decisions of the past year.

The United Nations still has a role to play in Iraq. It has to be clearly defined: to work with Iraqis to rebuild their country, restore democracy and regain their dignity, not to legitimise U.S.-led occupation. Also, in the rush to mortgage Iraq, Iraqi people should not be bound by contracts and long-term agreements signed on their behalf, nor should they be liable for odious debt incurred by Saddam's regime.

Why should they repay loans from a long list of foreign governments, all of whom surely lent the money in the full knowledge that it would be used to arm and support their persecutor?

(Haifa Zangana is an Iraqi-born novelist and artist. She is a former political prisoner of the Ba'ath regime) — ©Guardian Newspapers Limited 2004

The United States-appointed governing council cannot deliver democracy.

anteeing human rights and freedom. But a year on, the picture they painted is fading. Car bombs, shootings and kidnapping have become part of daily life. Only 50 per cent of the population have fresh water, compared with 60 per cent before "liberation". Electricity is intermittent. Drugs are sold openly in the streets. Ten thousand Iraqi civilians have been killed since the start of the conflict. But it is not for the security crisis alone that the majority of Iraqis hold IGC members in utter disdain.

Corruption is widespread. To get a job, one needs a *tazkia* (letter of recommendation) from one of the IGC parties. Allocation of subcontracts only follows a payment of 5-10 per cent of the value of the contract to the American contractors. Nepotism starts at the very top (eight ministers are close relatives of the IGC members).

Although most of the IGC members were once victims of Saddam's regime, they now turn a blind eye to the violations of human rights by occupation troops. One of the first

of Saddam's regime has yet been prosecuted either, despite the wish of most Iraqis that they be bought to justice.

For all the talk of democracy, opposition in any form to the IGC and the occupation is not acceptable. I saw women queuing for hours at the gates of Abu Ghraib prison in Baghdad begging for news of their loved ones, many of whom are political prisoners. It brought back bad memories. In the 1970s, under the Ba'ath regime, my mother had to wait in the same place desperate to hear if I was held inside.

In Baghdad, on January 12, I met Abdullatif Ali al-Mayah, professor of politics and director of Baghdad's Centre for Human Rights. He was concerned about women's and young people's rights. A believer in human dignity and justice, he spoke with anger about the plight of Iraqi people under occupation. We arranged to work together. On January 18, on *Al-Jazeera* television, he denounced IGC corruption and demanded elections as soon as

কমেছে গোলাবর শব্দ, ফালুজা ছাড়ছে বহু পরিবার



বাগদাদে জাপানি দূতবাস ঘিরে কড়া প্রহরা। রবিবার। — রয়টার্স

বাগদাদ ও ফালুজা, ১১ এপ্রিল — টানা এক সপ্তাহের সংঘর্ষের পরে অবশেষে কিছুটা শান্তির মুখ দেখল ফালুজা। মার্কিন সেনাবাহিনীর পক্ষ থেকে সংঘর্ষ-বিরতির প্রস্তাব দেওয়ার পরেও কাল পর্যন্ত যে-শহরে তাঁর লড়াই চলছে, সেখানে আজ সাধারণ মানুষ রাস্তায় বেরোতে পেরেছেন। সুন্নি গেরিলারা আজ আর অস্ত্র হাতে পথে দাপিয়ে বেড়ায়নি। গোলাগুলির শব্দ কমে আসতেই তিন লক্ষ মানুষের শহর ফালুজা থেকে নিরাপদ আশ্রয়ের উদ্দেশ্যে পাড়ি দিয়েছে বেশ কিছু পরিবার। বেশি রাতে আল জা জিরা টিভি জানিয়েছে ইরাকে অপহৃত আট জন বিদেশিকে গেরিলারা মুক্তি দিয়েছে। এঁদের মধ্যে এক ভারতীয়, তিন পাকিস্তানি, এক জন নেপালিও আছেন। গত সপ্তাহে নাসিরিয়ায় অপহৃত ব্রিটিশ ঠিকাদার গ্যারি টিলিকেও গেরিলারা মুক্তি দিয়েছে।

আমেরিকার নিযুক্ত গভর্নিং কাউন্সিলের সদস্য মাহমুদ ওথমান জানিয়েছেন, বারো ঘণ্টার জন্য সংঘর্ষ-বিরতির আর্থমিক সমঝোতা হয়েছিল। এখন বিরতির মেয়াদ বাড়ানো হতে পারে। কাউন্সিলের সদস্য-সহ একটি প্রতিনিধিদল আজ ফের ফালুজায় ফিরে এসেছে। সংঘর্ষ-বিরতি নিয়ে আলোচনায় তারা অংশ নেবে। কাউন্সিলে সুন্নি দল ইরাকি ইসলামিক পাটির কাহতান আল-কবেই জানিয়েছেন, ফালুজার হাসপাতালে কাল রাত থেকে আর মৃত্যুর খবর আসেনি। আহতের সংখ্যা ১২০০। তবে শান্তি নামনি বাগদাদে। শহরের আধিমিয়া এলাকায় একটি সুন্নি মসজিদ ও কোরান স্কুলে ট্যাক নিয়ে তল্লাশি চালিয়েছে মার্কিন সেনা। এই আধিমিয়াতেই কাল মার্কিন সেনার সঙ্গে সংঘর্ষে জড়িয়ে পড়েছিল কিশোর

বাগদাদে জাপানি দূতবাস ঘিরে কড়া প্রহরা। রবিবার। — রয়টার্স

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সংঘর্ষ থেমেছে

প্রথম পাতার পর
যে, আল জা জিরা টিভি বলেছে, ওই তিন জনকে আজই ছেড়ে দেওয়া হয়েছে। অপহরণকারীদের কাছ থেকে তেমনই ফালুজা-বার্তা তারা পেয়েছে বলে আল জা জিরা দাবি। পরে তারা জাপানি সংবাদসংস্থার খবর অস্বীকার করে। জাপানের অন্যতম বিদেশমন্ত্রী ইচিরো আইজাওয়া আশ্বাসে বলেছেন, “ওই তিন জাপানি কোথায় আছেন, সে ব্যাপারে কোনও নির্দিষ্ট তথ্য নেই। তারা নিরাপদে আছেন কি না, তা নিয়েও কিছু বলা যাচ্ছে না।” এ দিকে, বেশি রাতে এ এক পি জানায়, অপহরণকারীরা হুমকি দিয়েছে, সোমবারের মধ্যে জাপান সেনা সরতে শুরু না করলে ৩ পণবন্দিকে মেরে ফেলা হবে।

ক্রফোর্ডের খবর, ইস্টার রবিবারে কৌজি ছড়ানিতে মার্কিন সেনা ও তাঁদের পরিবারের সঙ্গে প্রার্থনায় যোগ দেওয়ার কথা প্রেসিডেন্ট জর্জ বুশের। আহত সৈনিকদের সঙ্গেও দেখা করবেন প্রেসিডেন্ট। বুশের বক্তব্য, “জোট সেনারা শত্রুদের খুঁজে বার করে লড়াই চালাচ্ছে। গণতন্ত্রের শত্রুরা না-হারা পর্যন্ত এই অভিযান চলবেই।” — রয়টার্স

US offers truce, fights erupt in Baghdad

M. Arun-Dayan
Baghdad, April 10 (Reuters): Street fighting erupted in Baghdad today and sporadic gunfire echoed across Falluja despite a new US truce offer and an effort by Iraqi officials to secure a peace deal with insurgents in the western city.

Gunmen shot at US troops from alleyways in northwest Baghdad's Sunni Adhimiya district. Reuters journalists saw an Iraqi shot dead in his car as he tried to flee the area.

In Karbala, pilgrims watched over by Shia militiamen gathered in smaller numbers than expected for Arbain, a holy occasion that US officials say could be a target for foreign Sunni militants linked to al Qaeda.

President George W. Bush

said US-led forces would defeat guerrillas wreaking havoc in Iraq and reaffirmed that an interim Iraqi government would take power on June 30.

"Our coalition's quick reaction forces are finding and engaging the enemy," Bush said after Iraq's bloodiest week of fighting since Saddam Hussein was ousted a year ago.

Several foreigners have been killed or taken hostage, including three Japanese, whose kidnappers have agreed to release them within 24 hours, the *al Jazeera* television channel said. Earlier they had threatened to kill them unless Japan pulled out its troops.

The truce offer in Falluja came after Iraqi politicians, de-

11/4
 crying the US' "collective punishment" meted out to local people, demanded a halt to the fighting. US Marines had launched a retaliatory crackdown in the city on Monday after four soldiers were burned and their bodies dragged through the streets.

US Brigadier General Mark Kimmitt told a news conference that fighting had continued despite Marines holding back on offensive operations since Friday.

An Iraqi negotiating team said rebels will agree to hold ceasefire talks if Marines withdraw from the city. "They want to see US forces pull out to something like five km outside the city," said Qahtan al-Rubaie, a spokesman for the Iraqi Islamic Party

He was speaking after members of his party, which is represented on the Iraqi Governing Council, and other Sunni religious leaders from Baghdad met Falluja religious and tribal leaders and government officials.

An aide to radical cleric Moqtada al-Sadr said he was willing to start peace talks if foreign troops left Najaf, freed detained Sadr followers and ended the siege of Falluja.

The US army said it killed 12 insurgents in northern Iraq, destroying their truck with a missile, and killed three "insurgents" after clashes in the city of Mosul. At least three Iraqi police were killed in violence there, police said.

■ See Page 5



ON VIGIL: A Marine in Falluja on Saturday. (AFP)

Abductors to free Japanese captives soon

Reuters
Tokyo, April 10

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line on Sunday.

THE ABDUCTORS of three Japanese nationals in Iraq have decided to free their hostages within 24 hours in response to an appeal from Muslim clerics, *Al-Jazeera* satellite TV reported Saturday night. "The armed men who kidnapped three Japanese in Iraq have decided to release them within 24 hours", it said.

"A statement issued by the so-called 'Mujahideen Brigades' said they had responded to a request from the Council of Muslim Ulema in Iraq" to free the trio, *Al-Jazeera* added. The statement also urged the Japanese people to put pressure on their government to withdraw its troops from Iraq, according to the news channel.

An *Al Jazeera* spokesman said the Qatar-based channel received the information in a fax from the group called *Saraya al-Mujahideen*, which said on Thursday in a tape that it would kill the Japanese if Japan did not withdraw troops from Iraq by a dead-

The captors from the "Mujahideen Brigades" had threatened to burn the three alive if Japanese troops were not pulled out of Iraq by 12:00 GMT on Sunday, 72 hours after footage showing the three in captivity was broadcast on *Al-Jazeera*.

There was no word on the whereabouts of the three hostages and a senior Japanese diplomat sent to Jordan declined to say whether he had contacted the kidnappers.

About 1,000 protesters demanding that the troops come home gathered near Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi's office hours before US Vice-President Dick Cheney arrived to the start of a three-nation Asian tour.

Koizumi, facing his toughest test, has vowed not to pull out the troops, but some analysts say mishandling the crisis could bring down his government.

Cheney arrived in Japan lending support to Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi for keeping troops in Iraq despite rebel threats to execute the hostages.



AFP

US Vice-President Dick Cheney with his wife, Lynne, in Tokyo on Saturday.

Iraq rebels threaten to kill 30 more

Agence France Press
Dubai, April 10

A PREVIOUSLY unknown armed group in Iraq said on Saturday that it was holding 30 foreigners who would be brutally killed unless US-led coalition troops pulled out of Iraq, particularly the town of Fallujah, Al-Arabiya television reported.

"We, the Brigades of Martyr Sheikh Yassin, announce that we are holding 30 hostages, including Japanese, Bulgarians, Americans, Israelis, Spanish, Koreans, Italians and" other nationalities, a hooded spokesman for the group claimed in a statement read on the Dubai-based station.

The group, named after a revered Palestinian militant leader slain by Israel last month, said the hostages would meet the same gruesome fate as four US contractors in Fallujah, a bastion of Sunni Muslim insurgents west of Baghdad, unless their demands were met.

The spokesman, filmed among other group members, all wearing balaclavas, demanded "the departure of American forces and their allies" from Iraq and "the lifting of the siege of the town of Fallujah", otherwise the captives would be decapitated and their bodies mutilated.

"We will cut off their heads and drag them around the streets, mutilating their bodies, as in Fallujah", he said. Americans were mutilated and strung from a bridge. The authenticity of the statement could not be independently confirmed.

The four US contractors were ambushed in Fallujah last week. The charred bodies of two of the The "Jihad (holy war) Brigades for Mahomet announced the capture of a group of foreigners and demanded the end to the siege of Fallujah to release their hostages", said satellite station LBC in a statement.

The group gave no details on the identity, number or location of its alleged hostages, LBC said, adding that it was the first time Jihad Brigades for Mahomet had contacted the channel. Six foreign civilians have been kidnapped in the last few days amid deteriorating security and escalating violence.

Three Japanese, including an 18-year-old, were

American taken prisoner: Video

TV FOOTAGE on Saturday showed Iraqi insurgents holding a foreigner, apparently American, prisoner in a car, the latest in a rash of kidnappings of foreigners in Iraq during this week's violence. The prisoner, who spoke with a southern American accent and was apparently wounded in the arm, was filmed sitting in the backseat of a car with a gunman next to him, apparently on the main highway on Baghdad's western edge where fighting took place on Friday.

The footage was apparently filmed on Friday. The prisoner identified himself as Thomas Hamill to the cameraman, from Australia's ABC TV, and said he was part of a convoy that was attacked. The car then drove off down the highway with him still in the back seat.

AFP, Baghdad



In this image taken from a video clip, which was apparently filmed on Friday, a man who identified himself as Thomas Hamill, is held captive by Iraqi insurgents in a car outside Baghdad. AP

Fighting, gunfire amid US truce offer

Reuters/AFP
Baghdad, April 10

STREET FIGHTING erupted in Baghdad on Saturday and sporadic gunfire echoed across Falluja despite a new US truce offer and an effort by Iraqi officials to secure a peace deal with insurgents in the western city.

Gunmen shot at US troops from alleyways in northwest Baghdad's Sunni Muslim Adhimiya district. Insurgent saw an Iraqi shot dead in his car as he tried to flee the area. For the first time, US troops moved in strength into the heartland of the rebellion by the militia of Shia cleric Muqtada al-Sadr. More than 1,000 troops backed by tanks pushed into Kut, retaking po-



AFP
A US soldier carries away an Iraqi boy from the scene of attack on an American tank in Baghdad on Saturday.

lice stations and government buildings seized this week by Shia gunmen.

Elsewhere, fighting with al-Sadr's al-Mahdi Army militia diminished. Coalition forces largely left gunmen in firm control in three cities of south central Iraq, and farther south, coalition troops have largely succeeded in taming the uprising, though Italian troops still saw light fighting in the city of Nasiriyah.

In the Shia shrine city of Karbala, pilgrims gathered in far smaller numbers than expected for Arbain, a holy occasion that US officials say could be a target for Sunni militants.

Anti-American Shia militiamen were out in force, clashing with Polish troops. The US authorities

said they could not guarantee the security of the million or more pilgrims expected.

The truce offer in Fallujah came after Iraqi politicians, decrying US "collective punishment" meted out to local people, demanded a halt to the worst fighting since Saddam Hussein fell.

Peace efforts

A delegation, including members of Iraq's US-installed interim leadership, entered the insurgent bastion of Fallujah on Saturday to hold talks on ending the fighting, a US officer said. "The interim governing council members headed to a mosque", said Captain Will Dickens, who commands the US checkpoint.

The N24 rolling news channel reported that the two, aged 25 and 38, were travelling between the Jor-

where US forces were engaged on Saturday in a sixth day of combat against Sunni insurgents.

network ZDF reported that two German men had gone missing near the town of Fallujah, west of Baghdad,

danian capital Amman and Baghdad in a convoy that was attacked near Fallujah on Wednesday.

There's no evidence to suggest it is a case of hostage-taking". German public television

বিদ্রোহ ছড়াল বাগদাদ শহরেও

৩০ জুনের মধ্যেই
ক্ষমতা হস্তান্তর,
জানিয়ে দিলেন বুশ

বাগদাদ, ১০ এপ্রিল: এক বছর আগে যতটা সহজে বাগদাদের দখল নিতে পেরেছিল মার্কিন সেনাবাহিনী, এখন তাদের পরিস্থিতি ততটাই কঠিন হয়ে পড়েছে। এত দিন গেরিলা হামলার প্রতিরোধ করলেও আজ শহরের রাজপথে সাধারণ মানুষের বিদ্রোহের সামনে পড়েছে মার্কিন সেনারা। বাগদাদের উত্তর-পশ্চিমে সুন্নি অধ্যুষিত আধিমিয়া এলাকায় সাধারণ মানুষ মার্কিন সেনাদের সঙ্গে প্রবল লড়াই শুরু করেছেন। আধিমিয়ার রাস্তায় রাস্তায় শনিবার সশস্ত্র তরুণ ও কিশোরেরা রাইফেল ও গ্রেনেড নিয়ে মার্কিন সেনাদের সঙ্গে লড়াই করছে। সুন্নি গেরিলাদের প্রবল প্রতিরোধ সত্ত্বেও বাগদাদের পশ্চিমে ফালুজায় আজ মার্কিন সেনা নতুন করে যুদ্ধবিরতি ঘোষণা করেছে। গেরিলাদের উত্তর, মার্কিন মেরিনরা শহর থেকে অন্তত পাঁচ কিলোমিটার দূরে গেলে তবেই এই বিষয়ে আলোচনায় বসবে তারা। বাগদাদ-ফালুজা সড়কে মার্কিন কনভয়ের উপর হামলা চালিয়েছে গেরিলারা। বাগদাদ বিমানবন্দরের প্রধান রাস্তাটিতেও মার্কিন ট্যাঙ্ক ধ্বংস করেছে তারা।

ইরাকে অবস্থানরত বিদেশি সেনারা এই মুহূর্তে প্রবল চাপে। ইতালির সেনাদের মনোবল বাড়াতে প্রধানমন্ত্রী সিলভিও বার্লুসকোনি নাসিরিয়া গিয়েছেন। এই প্রবল উত্তেজনার মধ্যেই কারবালা শহরে আরবিন উৎসব পালন করতে জড়ো হয়েছেন শিয়া সম্প্রদায়ের মানুষ। কারবালাতেও শহরের বাইরে শিয়াবাহিনীর সঙ্গে পোলিশ সেনাদের প্রবল লড়াই চলছে। গত সপ্তাহে ইরাকে ৫১ জন মার্কিন সেনা ও কয়েকশ' সাধারণ ইরাকি মারা গিয়েছেন। ফালুজায় সুন্নি গেরিলাদের প্রবল প্রতিরোধের সামনে কিছুটা পিছু হটে কাল ইরাকের মার্কিন প্রশাসক পল ব্রেমার একতরফা যুদ্ধবিরতি ঘোষণা করে সুন্নি গেরিলাদের সঙ্গে আলোচনার প্রস্তাব দেন। ইরাকের বর্তমান পরিস্থিতিতে ঘরে বাইরে কড়া সমালোচনার মুখে পড়েছেন জর্জ বুশ। কিন্তু তা-ও ইরাকে ৩০ জুনের মধ্যে ক্ষমতা হস্তান্তরের প্রক্রিয়া ব্যাহত হবে না বলে জানিয়েছেন বুশ। “স্বাধীনতার শত্রুরা এক দিন হারবেই। ৩০ জুন ইরাক তার সার্বভৌমত্ব ফিরে পাবে”— এক রেডিও বক্তৃতায় বলেছেন বুশ। তবে ক্ষমতা হস্তান্তরের পরেও আমেরিকা নতুন ইরাকি সরকারকে সর্বকম সহায়তা করবে বলে তিনি জানান। কিন্তু বুশের বিরোধী ডেমোক্রেট দল ওয়াশিংটনে জানিয়েছে এই অবস্থায় ইরাকে ক্ষমতা হস্তান্তর প্রক্রিয়া সে দেশে গৃহযুদ্ধের সম্ভাবনা তৈরি করতে পারে। ইরাক প্রসঙ্গে বিশ্বজনমত আমেরিকার বিরুদ্ধে গেলেও বুশের ঘনিষ্ঠ সহযোগী ব্রিটেন তার পাশেই আছে। ব্রিটিশ প্রতিরক্ষামন্ত্রী জিওফ হুন্স জানিয়েছেন ইরাকে শিয়া ও সুন্নি গেরিলাদের বিরুদ্ধে আমেরিকার নীতি ব্রিটেন সমর্থন করে। ইরাকের পরিস্থিতি বিপজ্জনক স্বীকার করে নিয়েও হুন্স বলেন মুষ্টিমেয় গেরিলাদের ভয়ে জেটবাহিনী পিছিয়ে আসবে না।

এ দিকে, ইরাকে তিন জন জাপানি পণবন্দির মুক্তির দাবিতে জাপান জুড়ে প্রতিবাদ মিছিল চলছে। এর মধ্যেই আমেরিকার ভাইস প্রেসিডেন্ট ডিক চেনি জাপানে এসেছেন। গেরিলারা ওই তিন জাপানি ত্রাণ কর্মীকে অপহরণ করে হুমকি দিয়েছে রবিবার সন্ধ্যার মধ্যে ইরাক থেকে জাপানি সেনাদের প্রত্যাহার না করা হলে ওই তিন জাপানিকে জীবন্ত পুড়িয়ে মারা হবে। জাপানের প্রধানমন্ত্রী জুনিচিরো কোইজুমি অবশ্য সাক্ষ জানিয়ে দিয়েছেন এই হুমকির চাপে ইরাক থেকে সেনা সরানো হবে না। তবে ওই তিন পণবন্দিকে উদ্ধার করার ব্যবস্থা নিতে আশ্বানে জরুরি বৈঠকে বসেছেন জাপানের উপবিদেশমন্ত্রী। তবে, আজ রাতে আরবি টিভি চ্যানেল আল জাজিরার খবরে বলা হয়েছে এই পণবন্দিদের আগামী ২৪ ঘণ্টার মধ্যে ছেড়ে দেওয়া হবে। মুসলিম মৌলবীদের এক সংগঠনের অনুরোধেই এই সিদ্ধান্ত নিয়েছে অপহরণকারী সরয়া আল-মুজাহিদিন গোষ্ঠী। তাদের পাঠানো ফ্যাক্স বার্তার ভিত্তিতেই এই খবর জানায় আল জাজিরা। এ দিকে, বাগদাদের জার্মান দূতাবাসের দুই কর্মী ফালুজা যাবার পথে নিখোঁজ হয়েছেন। এটি অপহরণ কি না তা নিশ্চিত নয়।

ইরাকের শিয়া নেতা মোকতাদা আল সদরের অনুগামী মেহদি সেনাবাহিনী কারবালা ও নজাফে লড়াই চালিয়ে যাচ্ছে। কারবালা শহরের বাইরে আল সদরের অনুগামীদের সঙ্গে পোলিশ সেনার গুলির লড়াই চলছে। এর মধ্যেই কারবালায় আজ শিয়াদের একটি বড় উৎসব আরবিন উপলক্ষে প্রচুর মানুষ জমায়েত হয়েছেন। গত মাসে কারবালাতে আত্মঘাতী হামলার কথা মনে রেখেই ইরাকের মার্কিন প্রশাসক পল ব্রেমার বলেছেন, আরবিনের সময় সাধারণ মানুষের নিরাপত্তার আশ্বাস দিতে পারবে না মার্কিন সেনা। কারবালায় রাস্তায় আজও দাপিয়ে বেড়াচ্ছে মেহদি সেনাবাহিনী ও আর একটি শিয়া গোষ্ঠী বদর ব্রিগেড। মার্কিন প্রশিক্ষণে ইরাকে নতুন যে পুলিশ বাহিনী তৈরি হয়েছে তাদের কোনও চিহ্ন নেই পথেঘাটে। সাদ্দাম জমানায় ইরাকের সংখ্যাগরিষ্ঠ শিয়ারা তাদের ধর্মীয় অনুষ্ঠান পালনের অনুমতি পেতেন না। গত বছর সাদ্দামের পতনের পর এ বারই প্রথম শিয়াদের পবিত্র তীর্থ কারবালায় মহরম ও আশুরা পালনের জন্য এসেছিলেন ইরাক ও পার্শ্ববর্তী ইরান থেকে অসংখ্য শিয়া। কিন্তু মহরমের দিন ভয়াবহ

এর পর পাঁচের পাতায়



মার্কিন লক্ষ্যবস্তুরে এখন পাথর ছুড়ছে ইরাকি বাসকও। বাগদাদ বিমানবন্দরের কাছে জ্বলন্ত ট্রাক দেখে উল্লাস তার সঙ্গীদের। — এ এক পি

ক্ষমতা হস্তান্তর

প্রথম পাতার পর

বিবেশ্বরনের পর ও ইরাক জুড়ে গত এক সপ্তাহের প্রবল সংঘর্ষের জেরে আজকের আরবিন উৎসবে তেমন উল্লেখযোগ্য ভিড় নেই। জোট সেনার বিরুদ্ধে গত ক'দিন শিয়া ও সুন্নিদের বিদ্রোহ নিয়ে ইরাকিদের মধ্যে মিশ্র প্রতিক্রিয়া দেখা গিয়েছে। কালই দক্ষিণের বন্দর শহর বসরায় শিয়া ও সুন্নিরা যৌথ ভাবে প্রার্থনা করেছিল। শিয়াপ্রধান কারবালা থেকে ত্রাণসামগ্রী পৌঁছেছিল সুন্নি ফালুজায়। গত কয়েক দিনের লড়াইয়ে সবচেয়ে বেশি ক্ষতি হয়েছে সাধারণ মানুষের। কেবল ফালুজাতেই মারা গিয়েছেন ৩০০-রও বেশি ইরাকি। তাই সাধারণ ইরাকিদের মধ্যে গেরিলাদের বিরুদ্ধেও ক্ষোভ দানা বাঁধছে। অনেকেই মনে করছেন, নিজেদের রাজনৈতিক স্বার্থ চরিতার্থ করতেই লড়াই করছে আল সদরের বাহিনী।

— রয়টার্স

IRAQ UPRISING / CIVILIANS FLEEING FALLUJAH

Cleric serves quit ultimatum on U.S.

By Atul Aneja

MANAMA, APRIL 9. After five days of fierce fighting, U.S. authorities in Iraq have declared a halt to "offensive operations" in the embattled Sunni stronghold of Fallujah amid further signs of cooperation between Sunni and Shia fighters and warning by a key Shia cleric that Americans should leave Iraq or face a nationwide revolt.

In escalating violence, Iraqi guerillas have reportedly seized the main road to Fallujah from Abu Ghraib, west of Baghdad after attacking a U.S. supply convoy of fuel and medicines. Eyewitnesses said that nine bodies were still burning in the vehicles and billowing smoke could be seen several km away. An Iraqi group announced that it had abducted four Italians and two Americans in the Abu Ghraib district.

On Thursday, seven people including three Japanese, two Palestinians, one Briton and one Canadian were kidnapped. The U.S. civil administrator in Iraq, Paul Bremer, announced this morning a unilateral truce to allow passage of humanitarian supplies and give mediators a chance to hold talks with the guerillas.

There are conflicting reports on whether the cease-fire was holding. Reports from Fallujah said that fighting had resumed. The Arabic Al Jazeera television station has reported that there has been a steady stream of casualties to the hospitals



Holding Iraqi and Palestinian flags, protesters march with armed militants during a demonstration against the U.S.-led military campaign in Iraq, in Gaza city on Friday. — Reuters

ing the port of Basra to Baghdad passes through it. The Shia stronghold of Karbala is also witnessing fierce fighting between the Mehdi Army and a combination of Polish and Bulgarian troops.

These clashes are taking place at a particularly sensitive moment as millions of worship-

pers are expected to throng the city over the weekend to observe the Shia festival of Arbain.

With the Iraqi revolt against the U.S. occupation gathering momentum, Mr. Al Sadr has asked the U.S. President, George Bush, to withdraw troops from Iraq or face a 'revolution.'

In his Friday sermon read

out in the mosque in Kufa by one his deputies, Mr. Al Sadr said: "I address my enemy (Mr. George) Bush. You are now fighting an entire nation, from south to north, from east to west, and we advise you to withdraw troops from Iraq. I call on America not to confront the Iraqi revolution."

10 APR 2004

Japanese & Koreans held hostage in Iraq

Agencies
Dubai, April 8

THREE JAPANESE civilians and eight South Koreans were kidnapped in Iraq on Thursday, according to media reports.

Arab television al-Jazeera aired a video on Thursday showing three Japanese, including a woman, it said were taken hostage by an Iraqi group vowing to kill them if Japan does not leave Iraq. The South Koreans were detained by unidentified "armed men", but one was later released, the South Korean Yonhap news agency reported, citing an unnamed Foreign Ministry official in Seoul. The report gave no further details.

A statement by the hitherto unknown Iraqi group called Saraya al-Mujahideen (Mujahideen Brigades), shown by the channel, gave Japan three days from the airing of the video to withdraw its troops from Iraq before it killed the hostages.

The Arabic statement said Japan had betrayed Iraqis by supporting the US occupation of Iraq.

"We tell you that three of your children have fallen prisoner in our hands and we give you two op-

tions — withdraw your forces from our country and go home or we will burn them alive and feed them to the fighters," it said.

"You have three days from the date of this tape's airing."

The hostages were shown wearing civilians clothes. Passports shown on the video carried the woman's name as Nahoko Takato and the two men as Noriaki Imai and Soichiro Koriyama. At least one of them had a press identification card.

Japanese public broadcaster NHK said Takato belonged to a human rights group and she has been involved in relief work for children in Iraq since last year.

Imai had been planning a trip to Iraq to do field work on the possible effects of depleted uranium weapons and Koriyama is a freelance cameraman, NHK added.

Japanese Foreign Ministry spokesman Hatsuhsa Takashima said: "The only thing I can say is we watched al-Jazeera...and what al-Jazeera reported is what we are now trying to confirm."

Earlier on Thursday, Japan vowed to make no hasty decisions about its 550 non-combat troops in the southern city of Samawa after explosions near their camp.

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THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

নজাফ, কুট

বাগদাদ, ৮ এপ্রিল—সাদাম হুসেনকে গণিত্য করার এক বছর পূর্তির আগের দিনই ইরাকে মার্কিন সেনাপ্রধান জানিয়ে দিলেন দক্ষিণ ইরাকের নজাফ ও কুট শহরের উপর মার্কিন সেনার আর কোনও নিয়ন্ত্রণ নেই। ইরাকে মার্কিন সেনাবাহিনীর প্রধান রিকার্ডে স্যানচেস জ্ঞানান এই দু'টি শহরের নিরাপত্তার ভারপ্রাপ্ত মার্কিন, ইউক্রেনীয় ও স্পেনীয় সেনারা শহরের বাইরে নিজেদের ঘাঁটিতে চলে এসেছে। শিয়া নেতা মোকতাদা আল সাদরের অনুগামী মেহদি সেনা এই দু'টি শহরের কেন্দ্রে গুরুত্বপূর্ণ কয়েকটি বাড়ি দখল করে নেওয়ায় মার্কিন সেনাদল পিছু হটতে বাধ্য হয়েছে। কালই শিয়াবাহিনী নাসিরিয়ায় বেশ কয়েকটি গুরুত্বপূর্ণ সেতু দখল করেছিল।

ইরাকের সামগ্রিক নিরাপত্তা পরিস্থিতি আরও খারাপ হয়ে পড়েছে একের পর এক বিদ্রোহী নাগরিকদের অপহরণের ঘটনায়। বৃহস্পতিবার ইরাকে সাত জন দক্ষিণ কুর্দীয়, তিন জাপানি ও এক ব্রিটিশ নাগরিকের অপহৃত হওয়ার খবর পাওয়া

আমেরিকার

গিয়েছে। আরবি টিভি চ্যানেল আল জা জিরা আজ তিন জন জাপানি বন্দির ছবি সম্প্রচার করেছে। সারামা আল মুজাহিদিন নামে একটি অজ্ঞাতপরিচয় ইরাকি গোষ্ঠী এই ভিডিওটিতে হুমকি দিয়েছে তিন দিনের মধ্যে জাপান ইরাক থেকে সেনা প্রত্যাহার না করলে তারা এই বন্দিদের জীবন্ত পুড়িয়ে মারবে। এই বন্দিদের মধ্যে এক জন মহিলাও আছে। এদের মধ্যে এক জনের কাছে সাংবাদিকদের পরিচয়পত্র আছে। তবে কোরীয় বা ব্রিটিশ বন্দিদের মুক্তির জন্য কোনও দাবি পেশ করেনি গেরিলারা। ইরানি তিভিতে আজ দুই ইজরায়েলি আরব বন্দির ছবিও সম্প্রচার করা হয়। এরাও ইরাকি গেরিলাদের হাতে ধরা পড়েছেন।

দক্ষিণ ইরাকের সামাওয়া শহরে ৫৫০ জন জাপানি সেনা রয়েছে। আজ সকালে তাদের সেনাঘাঁটির সামনে বিক্ষোভ হওয়ার পর জাপান জানিয়েছে সেনা প্রত্যাহারের ব্যাপারে তারা কোনও আতঙ্কিত সিদ্ধান্ত নেবে না। জাপানি বিশেষজ্ঞদের

নিয়ন্ত্রণে নেই, ইরাকে হিংসা অব্যাহত

মুখপাত্র জানিয়েছেন আল জা জিরা'র ওই ধর্ম সম্পর্কে তারা খোঁজ নিচ্ছেন।

নাসিরিয়ায় এই সপ্তাহে গ্যারি টিল্কি নামে এক জন ব্রিটিশ ঠিকাদার অপহৃত হয়েছেন বলে জোট বিদেশমন্ত্রক টিল্কির নিখোঁজ হওয়ার খবর স্বীকার করেছে। রাজধানী বাগদাদেও আজ বেশ কয়েকটি বিক্ষোভের শব্দ শোনা গিয়েছে। মার্কিন সেনার সদর দফতরের নিরাপত্তা বেষ্টিত মধ্য থেকেই ওই বিক্ষোভের শব্দ শোনা গিয়েছে।

শিয়াদের পবিত্র শহর কারবলা থেকেও বিদেশি সেনাদের চলে যাওয়ার চরমপত্র দিয়েছেন আল সদর। এই সপ্তাহের শেষে কারবলায় শিয়াদের একটি বড় ধর্মীয় উৎসব হওয়ার কথা। "এই পবিত্র ভূমি থেকে সমস্ত দখলদার সেনা হটিয়ে আমরা ইমাম হুসেনকে উপহার দিতে প্রস্তুত" — চরমপত্রে বলেছেন সদর। কারবলায় গত চার দিন ধরে পোলিশ ও বুলগেরীয় সেনাদের সঙ্গে শিয়াবাহিনীর

হিংসা অব্যাহত

বর্তমান পরিস্থিতির জেরে ইরাকের মার্কিন নিয়ন্ত্রিত গভর্নিং কাউন্সিলের মধ্যেও ফাটল দেখা দিয়েছে। আজ ইরাকের স্বরাষ্ট্রমন্ত্রী নৌরি বাদরান মুহাম্মাদা থেকে পদত্যাগ করেছেন। ইরাকের মার্কিন প্রশাসক পল ব্রেয়ার প্রতিরক্ষামন্ত্রক ও স্বরাষ্ট্রমন্ত্রক শিয়াদের হাতে রাখার ব্যাপারে আপত্তি করেন, তার প্রতিশ্রুতি দেই বাদরান ইস্তফা দিয়েছেন বলে জানিয়েছেন। উল্লেখ্য, এই মন্ত্রিসভায় শিয়ারাই সংখ্যাগরিষ্ঠ।

সম্প্রতি আল সাদরের সংবাদপত্র মার্কিন প্রশাসন বন্ধ করে দেওয়ার পর থেকে শিয়ারা ইরাক জুড়ে প্রবল প্রতিরোধ শুরু করেছেন। যে ভাবে এই শিয়া বিদ্রোহীদের দমন করার চেষ্টা চালাচ্ছে আমেরিকা তার বিরুদ্ধে সরব হয়েছে ইরাকের সর্বোচ্চ শিয়া নেতা মুহাম্মাদ আলি আল সিস্তানিও। তবে একই সঙ্গে তিনি দেশে শান্তি ফিরিয়ে আনার জন্য যুগ্মবান দুই পক্ষের কাছেই আবেদন করেছেন। ইরাকের

হিংসা অব্যাহত

পরিস্থিতিতে চিন্তিত আন্তর্জাতিক দুনিমাও। রাশিয়ার উপবিদেশমন্ত্রী ইউরি ফেদোভ বলেছেন, ইরাক ক্রমেই সন্ত্রাসের খাস তালুক হয়ে উঠছে।

এ দিকে, বাগদাদের পশ্চিমের সুন্নি প্রভাবিত ফালুজা শহরে গত রবিবার থেকে মার্কিন সেনার সঙ্গে গেরিলাদের সংঘর্ষে কমপক্ষে ৩০০ ইরাকি মারা গিয়েছেন, আহত হয়েছেন চারশোরও বেশি মানুষ। মসজিদ থেকে মৌলবির মৃতদেহগুলিকে একটি খেলার মাঠে নিয়ে গিয়ে সমাধিস্থ করার নির্দেশ দিয়েছেন। রেডক্রসের মুখপাত্র নানা দৌমানি জানিয়েছেন ফালুজায় ওয়ুফপত্র ও অন্যান্য চিকিৎসার সরঞ্জাম পৌঁছে দিতে কয়েকটি ট্রাক রওনা হলেও শহরের প্রধান হাসপাতালে তারা ঢুকতে পারেনি।

ইরাকের পরিস্থিতি যে ক্রমশ আমেরিকার নিয়ন্ত্রণের বাইরে চলে যাচ্ছে তা এখনও মনেতে নারাজ বৃশ ও তাঁর সহযোগীরা। প্রতিরক্ষামন্ত্রক ডেনাভ রামসফেল্ড বলেছেন প্রয়োজনে ইরাকে আরও সেনা পাঠানো হবে। — রয়টার্স

Shia fighters take control of three Iraqi towns

814
40-1

● 40 killed in U.S. attack on Fallujah mosque

By Atul Aneja

MAMAMA, APRIL 7. The uprising in Iraq against American occupation gathered momentum today with Shia fighters taking control of three major towns and holding on to three others. Kirkuk in the north emerged as the new flashpoint.

In the Sunni stronghold of Fallujah, where a major U.S. operation is under way, around 40 persons were killed when a U.S. helicopter fired three missiles at a mosque compound.

The U.S. military command in the country today threatened to "destroy" the key Shia militia heading the uprising after the killing of 12 U.S. troops in an attack in the restive town of Ramadi on Tuesday. The U.S. military commander in Iraq, Brigadier General Mark Kimmitt, told a news conference that, "in the central and southern regions of Iraq, coalition and Iraqi security forces are conducting operations to destroy the Mehdi army."

The Mehdi army is the militia loyal to the

firebrand Shia cleric, Moqtada al Sadr.

The attack on the mosque in Fallujah took place when worshippers had gathered for afternoon prayers. Soon after the strike, cars ferried bodies from the scene to makeshift hospitals that were set up in private homes.

Angry residents gathered around the mosque, whose wall was partly destroyed. Mosques in Fallujah have called for a "holy war" against Americans. Women carrying guns were seen on the streets before the attack.

In Kirkuk, in the north, an estimated 1,500 people took part in a violent demonstration protesting against the U.S. "massacres" in Fallujah. At least eight Iraqis were shot dead and 12 wounded in an exchange of fire with U.S. forces.

In the fighting for the Sunni cities of Ramadi and Fallujah, at least 30 Americans and more than 150 Iraqis were reported killed.

Analysts say that the attack in Ramadi, dominated by Sunnis, could be "diversion-

ary" and intended to ease the pressure on fighters encircled in Fallujah. It is seen as the first major instance of military coordination between Sunni and Shia guerilla fighters.

As the anti-American revolt swept through Iraq, Shia fighters brought down a U.S. helicopter in Baquba, a town on the outskirts of Baghdad. Television pictures showed the chopper burning on a field, but there has been no word on casualties so far.

(A Reuters report from Beirut quoted a top aide of Mr. Al Sadr as saying that the cleric's forces had captured a number of coalition soldiers during clashes throughout Iraq.)

On the fourth day of the revolt, Ukrainian forces allied to the U.S. occupation have withdrawn from the southern Iraqi town of Al Kut, which is now under the control of Mr. Al Sadr's forces. The Mehdi army has also taken a firm hold on Kufa, on the outskirts of Najaf, as well as on Diwaniyeh, the first town that has fallen to the militia.

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SHIAS JOIN THE RESISTANCE

HPD-10

THE OCCUPATION OF Iraq by the United States and its few allies has become increasingly untenable with the Shia community in the country joining the armed uprising against the foreign forces. The Coalition Provisional Authority, the instrumentality with which the occupation is administered, prefers to characterise the violent clashes between foreign troops and a militia loyal to Shia cleric Moqtada al Sadr as nothing more than isolated and easily controllable incidents. However, the Shias are not likely to quieten down soon, as more than 60 members of the community have already been killed in clashes in Baghdad, Kufa and several other towns in southern Iraq. They may well be further inflamed if the Authority carries out its threat to arrest Mr. Al Sadr. Other political and paramilitary organisations, representing Sunnis as well as Shias, are understood to have contacted the firebrand cleric. An occupation force already under considerable pressure from guerrillas will find itself in a dire situation if the insurgents act upon Mr. Al Sadr's instructions that they should emulate Hamas and Hizbollah in the efforts to "intimidate their enemies." While Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani and other senior clerics do not approve of the politics or methods of the Sadr-led militia, they might not be able to stop the masses from rallying to its cause.

The relationship between the Shias and the occupation forces was far from smooth even before this phase of violence. Washington might have thought that it was entitled to the gratitude of Iraq's majority community that is well-positioned to take over power when, and if, the occupation ends. However, the Shias take an entirely different view of the sequence of events. They have not forgotten that the U.S. had at first encouraged them to rise against the regime of Sad-

dam Hussein at the end of the 1991 war and then failed to come to their rescue when the Ba'athists took brutal measures to crush the revolt. The Shias' scepticism about American motives is reinforced by the perception that their liberation was not the main objective that the invaders sought to achieve in 2003, all the propaganda notwithstanding. The manner in which the Authority controlled developments after the invasion has exacerbated rather than allayed Shia misgivings. The community has reservations about the draft interim constitution and has reason to be displeased with the procedures adopted for setting up an interim government that will take office before June 30. The Authority has already hand-picked nominees to head the health, education, defence and intelligence ministries and is likely to constitute the rest of the Cabinet in similar fashion. While a Shia is likely to be appointed Prime Minister, the community will not have much reason to be satisfied. They and other Iraqis are aware that the Authority will continue to wield real power even after a nominal transfer.

The occupying powers will come under greater pressure if the various elements of the Iraqi resistance forge links with one another. That denouement, once unthinkable, does not now appear remote for a couple of reasons. One, Sunnis are already present in the Sadr militia's camp and two, the Shias have not turned against the other sect even when members of their community were killed in the several suicide bombings that have taken place. Sections of Sunni militants have, in fact, tried to keep alive the chances of unity between the two communities by trying to ensure that their resistance movement was not taken over by sectarian extremists. Iraq's turmoil is far from over.

Fallujah sealed off before raids

Agencies
Fallujah, April 5

US FORCES closed off the turbulent city of Fallujah on Monday ahead of a major operation against insurgents following the grisly slayings of four American security contractors last week.

Meanwhile, an Iraqi judge has issued a murder arrest warrant for a radical Shi'ite Muslim cleric, Muqtada al-Sadr, for the slaying of another Shi'ite leader soon after the US-led invasion of the country, coalition officials said Monday. Coalition spokesman Dan Senor announced the warrant but would not say when al-Sadr would be detained. "There'll be no advance warning", he said.

The announcement of the warrant came a day after violent clashes between militiamen loyal to al-Sadr that killed 52 Iraqis, eight US soldiers and a Salvadoran soldier — some of the worst gunbattles since the ouster of Saddam.

US commanders, on the other hand, have been vowing a massive response to pacify Fallujah, one of the most violent cities in the Sunni Triangle, the heartland of the anti-US insurgency north and west of Baghdad.

Early on Monday, US troops closed off entrances to Fallujah with earth barricades ahead of the planned operation, code named 'Vigilant Resolve'.

Some 1,200 US Marines and two battalions of Iraqi security forces were poised to enter the city to arrest



US Marines with the 2nd Battalion 1st Marine Regiment in an armoured carrier patrol the outskirts of Fallujah on Monday.

AP

suspected insurgents, said Lt. James Vanzant, 2nd Battalion, 1st Marine Expeditionary Force. He would not say when the troops would enter the city.

Military patrols entered the outer suburbs on reconnaissance missions and to broadcast warnings on loud speakers to residents to stay indoors until Tuesday.

"The city is surrounded," Vanzant said. "It's an extended operation. We want to make a very precise approach to this. ... We are looking for the bad guys in

Al-Qaida letter warns Spain

A LETTER purporting to be from al-Qaida warned Spain to withdraw its forces immediately from Iraq and Afghanistan or face "hellish" consequences, a Spanish newspaper reported on Monday. The ABC newspaper said it received the fax on Saturday signed by "Abu Dujana al-Afgani (of the) Ansar al-Qaida Europe group" which announced it was scrapping a "truce" designed to give Spain time to remove its forces.

AFP, Madrid

town." Iraqi police in the city visited mosques, dropping off Arabic leaflets from the US military, telling

residents that there was a daily 7 pm to 6 am curfew. It ordered them not to congregate in groups or carry

weapons, even if licensed. It instructed people that if US forces enter their homes, they should gather in one room and if they want to talk to the troops to have their hands up.

The move against Falluja, which is 32 miles west of Baghdad, could be the start of a US response to last Wednesday's horrific killings of four American contractors in the city. Insurgents dragged the contractors' charred bodies through the streets and hung two from bridges.

A witness reported that a US helicopter struck a residential area in the city or early Monday, killing five people. The bombing damaged five houses, said the witness, Mohammed Shaikat. There was no immediate US comment on the report. A Marine officer speaking on condition of anonymity, said US forces had a list of targets for raids. He would not give details. The Marines said they intended to take a softer approach with Fallujah residents, hoping to win popular support.

But the Marines have quickly found themselves mired in violence. On March 26, Marines and insurgents fought a lengthy street battle in the city that killed one Marine and five Iraqis.

Shi'ite area attack

US helicopters blasted targets in Baghdad on Monday as a showdown intensified with radical Shi'ite militiamen challenging America's post-war blueprint for Iraq.

Journalists said they saw two Apache helicopters attacking targets in the mainly Shi'ite Shuala district in the north west of the city, where a US vehicle was in flames.

There was no firm word on casualties in the strike, thought to be the first of its kind in Baghdad since the war that toppled Saddam Hussein nearly a year ago, but an anti-US cleric said five people had been killed and 10 injured. The violence opens a new front for US-led forces already struggling to contain attacks by Sunni Muslim insurgents.



Supporters of the anti-American cleric, Muqtada Al-Sadr, march on a Spanish garrison at Najaf in Iraq, on Sunday. — Reuters

24 killed as Spanish troops clash with Shia protesters in Iraq

By Atul Aneja

MANAMA, APRIL 4. Spanish troops clashed with Shia demonstrators loyal to Muqtada Al-Sadr, a leading Iraqi cleric, in Najaf on Sunday, leaving at least 24 people dead and over a 100 wounded.

The dead included four Salvadoran soldiers, who were under Spanish command as part of a brigade that includes forces from Central America. Nine other Salvadorans were injured in the clash.

Spanish troops opened fire on protesters heading towards their base in Kufa near Najaf, witnesses said. It was, however, not yet clear as to what led to the clash.

According to one report, the Spanish contingent opened fire, using machineguns, after demonstrators threw stones and tried to enter its base.

But a spokesman was quoted as saying that protesters had shot at the troops around noon (local time).

He added that an Iraqi build-

ing also came under attack. Hospital authorities in Najaf said the toll could rise as casualties were still being brought in.

Al-Sadr's supporters accused Spanish authorities of arresting Mustafa-al-Yaqoubi, the cleric's deputy, leading to widespread unrest.

The U.S. administrator in Iraq, Paul Bremer, said protesters had "crossed the line and moved to violence."

The collision with the troops caps a spate of Shia demonstrations sparked by the closure by

American authorities last Sunday of *Al Hawza*, a popular newspaper reportedly run by Al-Sadr's group.

Al-Sadr, who has been steering these demonstrations, has said that the stirring in Iraq is part of a larger struggle against the occupation in the region, where the U.S., in the case of Iraq, and Israel, in the case of Palestinian territories, are the occupiers.

On Saturday, members of the Mehdi Army, Al Sadr's militia marched through Sadr city, a Shia stronghold in Baghdad and

burnt an American and an Israeli flag.

In his Friday sermon, Al-Sadr declared that his group would render active support to two of Israel's biggest enemies — the Palestinian militant group Hamas and Lebanon-based Hizbollah. The first indication that Iraqi Shias saw inter-linkages between the American occupation of Iraq and the Israeli hold over the Palestinian territories came soon after the assassination by Israel of the Hamas leader, Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, last month.

Iraqis attack US army again

Assassins won't go unpunished, warns American administrator

Associated Press
Fallujah, April 1

INSURGENTS ATTACKED a US military convoy and a humvee was burned on Thursday near Fallujah, witnesses said, a day after the grisly killing and mutilation of four American civilians in the city.

It was not clear if there were any casualties in Thursday's assault. Television footage showed smoke pouring from the vehicle that had been abandoned on a roadside just outside the city. Witnesses said the Humvee was hit by a rocket-propelled grenade. US officials said they could not confirm the attack.

Also on Thursday, two explosions near a US-escorted fuel convoy wounded at least one Iraqi in northern Baghdad, witnesses said.

In Fallujah Iraqi police manned standard roadside checkpoints, but no US troops could be seen inside the city. Shops and schools were open. Some residents vowed to repel US forces if they raid the city.

"We will not let any foreigner enter Fallujah," said Sameer Sami, 40. "Wednesday's attack is proof of how much we hate the Americans."

On Wednesday, jubilant mobs dragged the burned, mutilated bodies of four American contractors through the streets and strung two of them up from a bridge after rebels ambushed their SUVs.

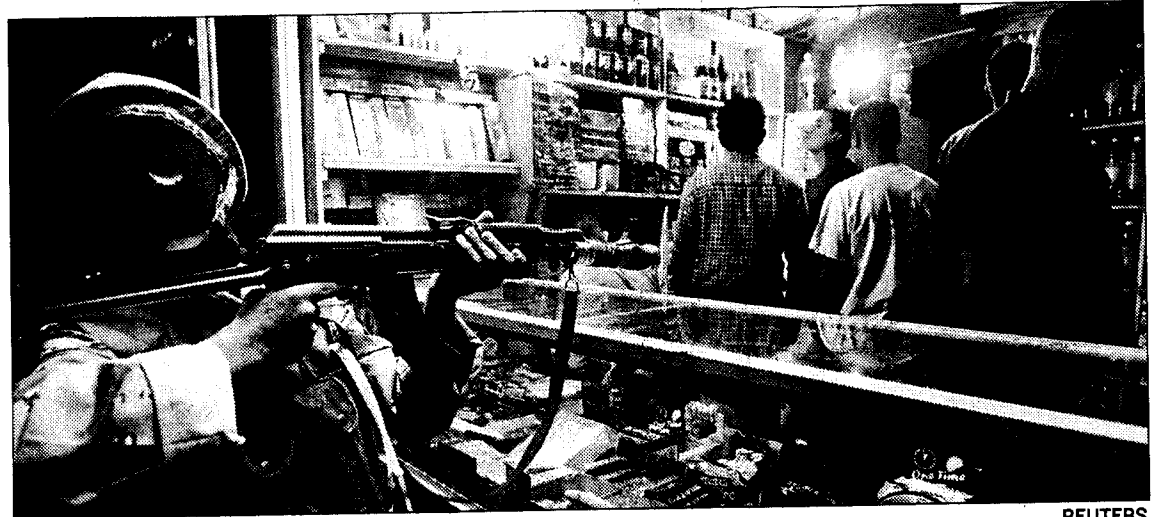
The abuse of the corpses was similar to the scene more than a decade ago in Somalia, when a mob dragged corpses of US soldiers through the streets of Mogadishu, eventually leading to the American withdrawal from the African nation. The images were broadcast worldwide and became the subject of the book and movie *Black Hawk Down*.

US officials denounced the violence and vowed to stay the course in Iraq.

The White House blamed terrorists and remnants of Saddam Hussein former regime for the "horrific attacks" on the American contractors.

"It is offensive, it is despicable the way these individuals have been treated," White House press secretary Scott McClellan said.

Referring to the planned June 30



REUTERS

A recruit from the Iraqi Civil Defence Corps trains his rifle on men in a shop during a raid on a Baghdad apartment.

transfer of sovereignty to Iraqis, McClellan said "the best way to honor those that lost their lives" is to continue with efforts to bring democracy to Iraq.

US officials did not identify the dead or the nature of their work because the next of kin had not yet been notified.

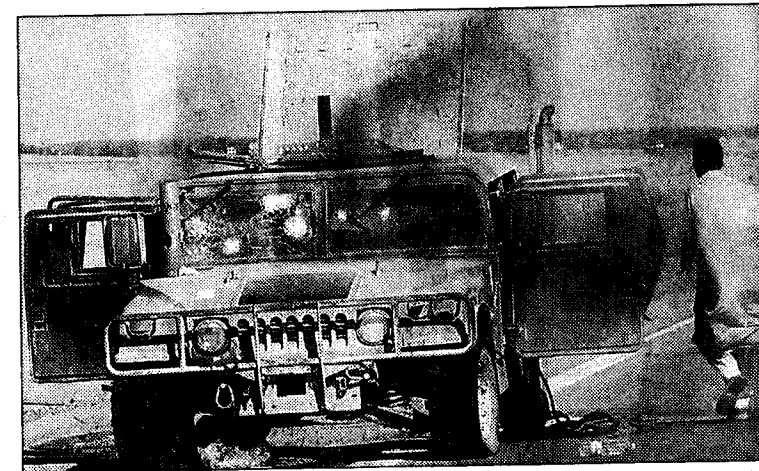
In Baghdad, U.S. Brig. Gen. Mark Kimmitt said the coalition would not be deterred from its mission to rebuild Iraq, and that numerous reconstruction projects were moving forward nationwide.

At least one Iraqi was killed in clashes between protesters and Iraqi police in the southern town of Basra on Thursday, witnesses said.

They said police were trying to control a group of about 100 people demanding that they be paid their salaries. The protesters threw stones and set tires on fire.

A Reuters photographer said he saw a dead man being carried away, his clothes stained with blood.

The British military, responsible for security in Basra, said it had no immediate information.



REUTERS

A US humvee burns on a highway near Falluja on Thursday after it was hit by a roadside bomb.

Bremer condemns civilians' killings

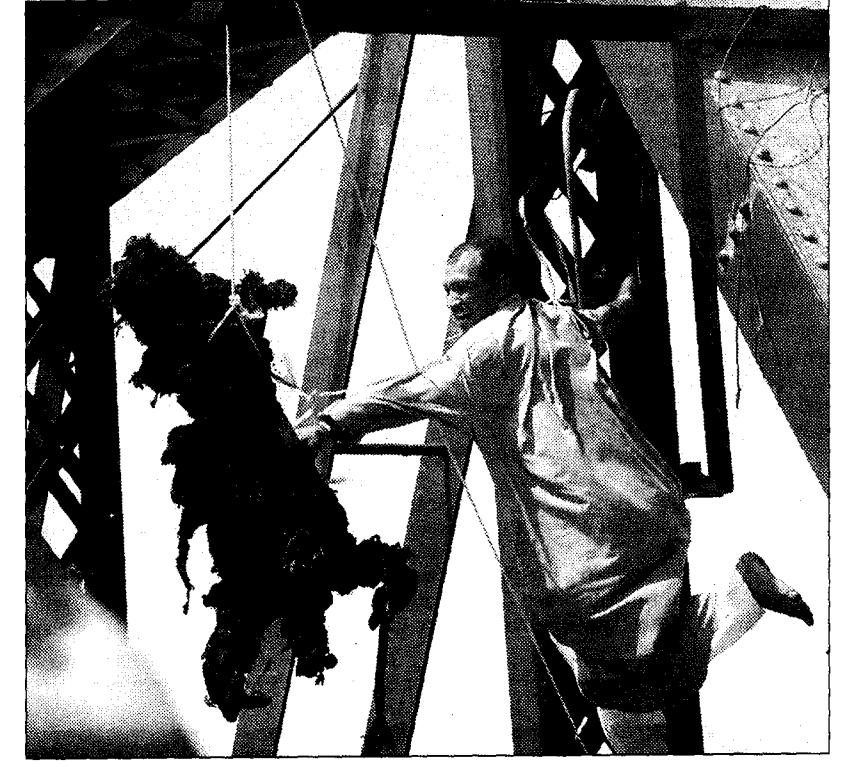
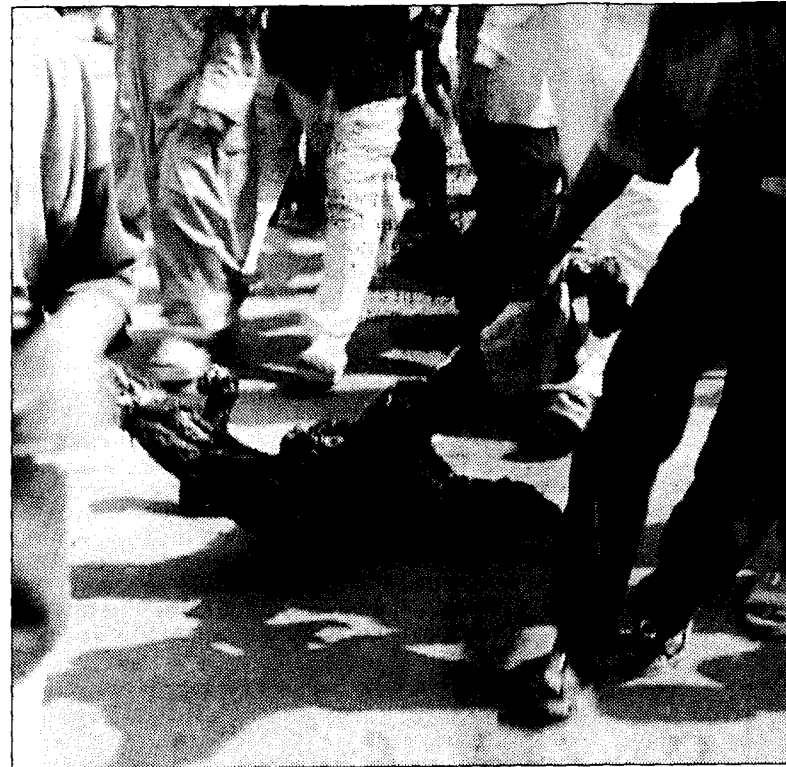
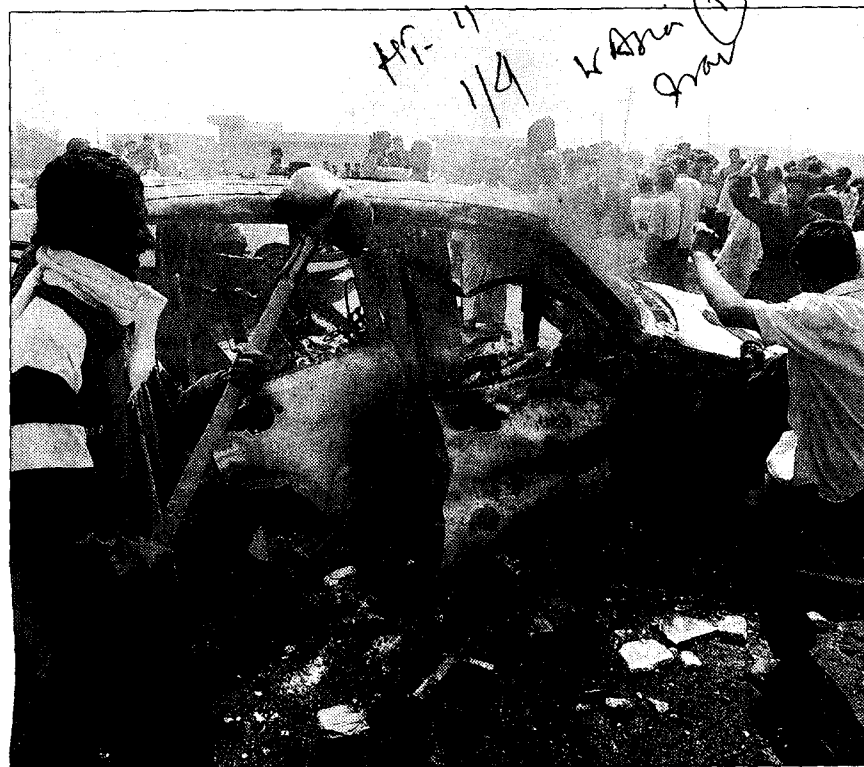
THE TOP US administrator in Iraq on Thursday condemned the grisly killing and mutilation of four American contractors in the city of Fallujah, and said their assassins would not go unpunished.

"Wednesday's events in Fallujah are dramatic examples of the ongoing struggle between human dignity and barbarism", L. Paul Bremer said at a graduation ceremony for police cadets. "The acts we have seen were despicable and inexcusable. They violate the norms of all religions including Islam that are the foundations of civilized society. Their deaths will not go unpunished", Bremer said. "Our sympathy goes out to the families of all civilian, military, Iraqi and coalition who have given their lives in the war to liberate Iraq and free it from terrorism", Bremer said.

"They have not died in vain", he added.

AP, Baghdad

Iraqis beat, chop up dead men on the streets



(Left) A man hits with a shovel as another kicks a burning car attacked in Fallujah on Wednesday. (Centre) Iraqis drag the body of a man after the attack. (Right) Iraqis chant anti-American slogans as charred bodies hang from a bridge over the Tigris river.

Agencies
Fallujah, March 31

AT LEAST nine people were killed in two separate attacks by insurgents in and around the volatile Iraqi city of Fallujah on Wednesday, including five US soldiers whose vehicle drove over a bomb, while angry residents mutilated two of the victims and vowed to make Fallujah "the cemetery of the Americans".

The coalition soldiers died when their convoy hit a roadside bomb in Al-Anbar province, west of Baghdad, a military coalition spokesman said, without giving further details. It was thought to be the worst single incident involving coalition troops since a US military helicopter was downed on January 8 near the flash-point town of Fallujah, also in Al-Anbar, killing all nine aboard.

There were horrific scenes following the other attack inside the city, 32 miles west of Baghdad, after gunmen targeted two civilian cars that residents said were carrying foreign nationals.

Witnesses said the two four-wheel drive vehicles were stopped

and attacked as they were traveling in opposite directions through the center of Fallujah. The occupants of the cars were killed and their vehicles set ablaze.

Gunmen in Fallujah, 50 kilometres (33 miles) from the capital, opened fire on two four-wheel-drive cars, killing at least some of the occupants and setting the vehicles ablaze before they fled, according to the local police. Witnesses saw at least four bodies, left charred in the road. Witness Hammadi al-Isawi, 28, said a third vehicle in the convoy evacuated more casualties, some badly burnt. Television pictures showed one burning body inside one of the sports utility vehicles. An AFP correspondent on the scene later saw two charred bodies lying on the ground nearby.

In a gruesome sequel to the ambush, angry Fallujah residents repeatedly smacked the two bodies with shovels, while others hurled bricks and rocks at the cars. One group danced around the bodies and cut them up into small parts, all the while shouting "long live Islam", the

MILITARY DEATHS IN IRAQ

The following are the latest US figures for the number of military deaths in the Iraq conflict: (Sources for Iraqi deaths are unofficial estimates). The figures in brackets refer to fatalities since May 1, when President Bush declared major combat over

<p>US, BRITISH AND OTHER TROOPS KILLED</p> <p>Combat/attacks</p> <p>■ United States 407 (292)</p>	<p>■ Britain 20 (12)</p> <p>■ Other nations 36 (36)</p> <p>Non-combat</p> <p>■ United States 191 (168)</p> <p>■ Britain 38 (13)</p> <p>■ Other nations 6 (6)</p> <p>Iraqis killed</p> <p>■ MILITARY 4,895 to 6,370 #</p> <p>■ CIVILIANS Between 8,799 and 10,649 *</p>	<p>(# = Unofficial think-tank estimates. No official figures available. * = Figure compiled on www.iraqbodycount.net, based on incidents reported by at least two media sources)</p> <p>NOTE: Non-combat is defined as accidents, fire from US or British forces killing their own troops, suicides and other incidents</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Reuters, London</p>
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AFP correspondent said. Iraqis threw stones at a corpse still inside one of two cars engulfed in flames in the volatile town. Two burnt bodies still lay in the street several hours after the attacks. Some witnesses said four people were killed, but it was not possible to confirm.

Moments earlier, young men stoned the vehicles which had been in flames following the attack with small arms fire by as-

sailants who fled the scene. One of the bodies was seen ablaze inside one of the cars before residents extracted it from the vehicle to lay it on the ground and attack it with the shovels.

"Fallujah will be the cemetery of the Americans," said one angry man, his face hidden by a scarf. "Revenge, revenge for Saddam", others shouted, referring to the ousted Iraqi president Saddam Hussein who has been held

by US forces since December.

One resident, Abdul Aziz Mohammed, said angry crowds dragged the bodies through the streets, dismembered them and hanged some of the mutilated corpses. One man was seen beating a corpse with a metal pole and another was doused with petrol as it lay burning in the road. Residents tied a cord to another body, attached it to a car and drove it down a street. "The

people of Fallujah hanged some of the bodies on the old bridge like slaughtered sheep", Mohammed said. "I saw it myself".

The identities of the slain men were unclear. One resident displayed what appeared to be dog tags taken from one body. Residents also said there were weapons in the targeted cars. The attack occurred in Anbar province, which encompasses Fallujah, Ramadi and other towns where anti-US insurgents are active. Residents said the bomb attack occurred in Malahma, 12 miles northwest of Fallujah.

The correspondent later saw the two bodies hanging upside down by their feet from a road bridge, one of them headless, as residents threw stones at them. A police car with four policemen fled the area of the incident. Pictures showed at least one person kicking a burned corpse and stamping on its head. A dead man with fair hair and in civilian clothes lay in the road beside one of the cars, his feet on fire and blood stains on his white shirt.

Footage from Associated Press Television News showed one American passport near a body and one resident displayed what appeared to be military dog tags. Some of the dead men were wearing flak jackets, Safa Mohammedi, a resident, said and their cars were the kind of four-wheel drive vehicles often used by coalition personnel. Residents also said there were weapons in the targeted cars.

The attack on US soldiers was about 12 miles northwest of Fallujah. Most of the coalition troops in that area are US marines. Using improvised explosive devices to detonate under coalition vehicles has been a favoured method of attack by insurgents. Explosive charges are often hidden inside soft-drink cans, bags or dead animal carcasses and wired to a simple detonator.

It was unclear whether the two attacks in Fallujah were linked.

Fallujah lies at the heart of the so-called "Sunni triangle", a hotbed of die-hard opposition to the US-led occupation, where US marines have been relieving their colleagues of the Army's 82nd Airborne.

Gaddafi brought under anti-terror tent

By Rashmee Z. Ahmed
TIMES NEWS NETWORK

London: Tony Blair has finally met, twice shaken hands, but not kissed, Muammar Gaddafi in his Bedouin tent outside Tripoli, thus symbolically bringing Libya in from three decades out in the cold and ending the West's pariah status for the oil-rich country. Blair sketched out the bigger picture for the war on terror, a new, solid and far-reaching coalition between the West and Al Qaida's Muslim but rabidly-secular opponents.

After a meeting, in which Gaddafi complimented Blair with an old man's envy — 'you're looking good you are young' — Blair told the world that Libya wanted to help fight Al Qaida.

He said Gaddafi could help defeat the fanatical forces within the Arab world and fighting terrorism was a cause Gaddafi shared with the West. And even as sections of Britain's popular tabloid press described Blair's brisk hand-pumping in Tripoli as a handshake with a man of blood, Blair scornfully dismissed comparisons of the maverick Arab dictator with Osama bin Laden.

Blair's lightning visit to Tripoli, the first by a British prime minister since Winston Churchill in 1943, was accompanied by his straight-faced confirmation that Anglo-Dutch oil giant Shell had signed a multi-million dollar deal to drill for gas off the untapped Libyan coast.



British Prime Minister Tony Blair (centre left) walks with Libya's Col. Gaddafi in Tripoli on Thursday

On Thursday Blair insisted it was the right decision to sit down and chat with the head of a country that has admitted to Europe's worst terrorist atrocity, the 1988 Lockerbie bombing, which left 270 people dead.

He pleaded, "Let us offer to states that want to renounce terrorism and the development of weapons of mass destruction our hand in partnership as Libya has courageously decided to do". Four days ago, the international chemical weapons watchdog said it had completed its inventory of Libyan weapons. Blair said that Libya had offered full and complete transparency. Libya's mainly Pakistan-supplied weapons of mass destruction programmes began to be dismantled from December 19.

Even so, to at least some commentators, the Blair-Gaddafi meeting remained a distasteful even derisory aspect of Western cashing in on the depletion of world's oil and defence sectors. "Should Mr Blair greet the head of a military dictator with a kiss on both cheeks, as is the custom?" pondered *The Scotsman*.

But Britain's best-selling tabloid, *The Sun* congratulated Blair. "Tony Blair may feel like holding his nose while shaking hands with Gaddafi," wrote its political editor, "but it's in Britain's interests to have Libya inside the al- tent spitting out, not outside spitting in".

Britain's leading defence manufacturer, BAE, was also said to be in advanced talks to sell civilian aircraft equipment to Libya.

The British business stampede into Libya, thought potentially to be worth several billion dollars — pre-empting the Americans, who are not far behind. Blair's historic, but hugely controversial meeting with Gaddafi comes exactly two days after the US sent its assistant secretary of state William Burns to Tripoli.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

26 MAR 2004

26 MAR 2004

Red Cross officials pay Saddam a visit

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WASH DC

Baghdad, Feb. 21 (Reuters): The International Committee of the Red Cross visited former Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein today for the first time since he was captured by US forces in Iraq in December, an ICRC spokeswoman said.

As is usual with ICRC visits to detainees, the organisation gave no details on Saddam's health or conditions after the visit by a team that included a doctor and an Arabic speaker.

"The visit took place this morning Baghdad time," the ICRC spokeswoman Antonella Notari said in Geneva.

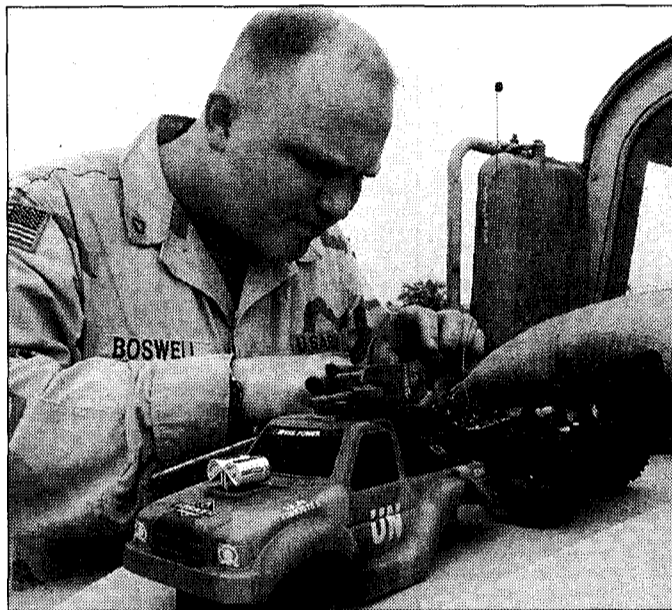
The ousted Iraqi leader has been held by US forces since his widely publicised capture on December 13, which the US-led occupation authority hoped would help stabilise the country before handing back power to Iraqis by a June 30 deadline.

Iraq's US governor Paul Bremer suggested in remarks broadcast today that it could take up to 15 months to hold elections in Iraq, risking putting Washington on a collision course with Iraq's most powerful religious leader who wants only a brief delay in polls.

Notari said the visit to the 66-year-old Saddam took place in Iraq but did not say exactly where, under an agreement with US forces. Saddam wrote a message to be delivered to his family, Notari said.

Under the terms of the Geneva Convention covering prisoners of war, which Washington has said applies to Saddam, US forces were obliged to give the ICRC access to the former President.

After he was deposed in the US-led war in April, Saddam



A soldier tries to fix a battery-powered toy car purchased at the US base in Tikrit. (AFP)

went on the run for eight months before his capture by American troops from a pit near his hometown of Tikrit.

Since then, the US administration has been struggling to ease attacks by Saddam loyalists and other guerrillas on US forces and Iraqi allies, as Washington prepares to hand over power to Iraqis in June.

The US timetable to hand over sovereignty to Iraqis by the end of June is set five months ahead of US presidential elections in which George W. Bush will be seeking re-election.

Bremer, speaking in an interview with the Dubai-based *Al Arabiya* television channel, said Iraq needed time to prepare for elections due to technical problems and other issues.

"These technical problems will take time to fix. The UN estimates somewhere between a year and 15 months," Bremer said.

"There are real important technical problems... and elections are not possible as the secretary-general announced yesterday."

Al Arabiya had been carrying Arabic translation of excerpts from the Bremer interview which said he had himself estimated that it could take that long for elections to be held.

UN secretary-general Kofi Annan has backed the US position that it would not be feasible to hold elections before the planned American handover of power to Iraqis on June 30.

Bush today reaffirmed US

strategic interests in helping Iraq become a sovereign nation. "The establishment of a free Iraq will be a watershed event in the history of West Asia, helping to advance the spread of liberty throughout that vital region," Bush said in his weekly radio address.

Iraq's top Shia leader Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, seen as holding the key to Iraq's political future, said in an interview published yesterday that any delay should be brief. Asked how long, he told Germany's *Der Spiegel*: "It should not last long."

Sistani had demanded direct elections before June 30 but recently agreed that polls required adequate preparations. Iraq's majority Shias had protested by the tens of thousands in support of the reclusive Sistani's call for early elections this year, and they could take to the streets again if he expresses displeasure with any of Bremer's decisions.

The Americans hope for a smooth power transfer to Iraqis but the country is gripped by a relentless insurgency in which suicide bombers attack US troops and their allies in Iraqi police and security forces at will.

Four US soldiers were wounded and their Iraqi translator was killed today when gunmen ambushed their convoy south of Baghdad, the US army said.

Guerrilla bombings and shootings have killed 378 US troops since the war that toppled Saddam Hussein began in March.

The violence is set against fears that simmering sectarian and ethnic tensions could erupt into a conflict.

Iraq: Bush, Blair seek new U.N. backing

By Kamal Ahmed

in Hindi

HO-10 22/3

THE UNITED Nations is to be given a lead role in post-occupation Iraq under British and American plans to shore up crumbling international support for the continuing military presence in the country. United Kingdom officials said there would be a sustained push for a fresh U.N. resolution 'mandating' the continued military presence in Iraq after the handover to the transitional government in June.

The move comes a week after the new Spanish Prime Minister, Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero, threatened to withdraw troops from the coalition force unless it was given a greater degree of international legitimacy. British officials said Republican claims from America that Spain had 'ap-

peased' terrorists were unhelpful and wrong. The Polish Government, which also supports the military action in Iraq, has now also suggested that it was misled on the reasons for war.

The resolution, which British sources believe will be backed by the Security Council, will also allow the U.N. a role in overseeing Iraq's first democratic elections and the judicial and legal framework which the new government will rely on to protect individual freedoms. Britain will then suggest a NATO role in security matters in Iraq, as happened successfully in Afghanistan.

The move comes as the British Labour Party adopted a new foreign policy document this weekend,

which said that all international conflict had to be 'within a U.N. framework'. In a potential snub to Tony Blair, the document, which is likely to be published as a policy paper before the next election, said that military action could only be taken 'as a last resort' and had to be 'in accordance with international law'.

An amendment demanding that all military action must be sanctioned by the U.N. was defeated at the party's national policy forum in Warwick.

The push by British diplomats for a new resolution reveals Mr. Blair's enthusiasm for U.N. 'cover' in Iraq. With international support slipping, Whitehall sources believe that the U.N. is the only route that can ensure

pan-European support for a continued presence in Iraq.

"When we need a resolution is fairly clear — when we are coming up to May and June. We will then need to address the prospect of a transitional government," said one senior British official closely involved in the negotiations. "We will have to cover the continuing multinational force and endorse that as being the clear wish of the Iraq people. And we'll need to look forward to what is going to be this enhanced U.N. role post-30 June."

He said the U.N. could ratify decisions made by the transitional government, help it prepare for elections and enshrine democracy. © *Guardian Newspapers Limited 2004*

ইরাক-যুদ্ধের বর্ষপূর্তিতে বিক্ষোভ, সমাবেশ বিশ্ব জুড়ে

২০ মার্চ— ইরাক যুদ্ধের প্রথম বর্ষপূর্তির দিনে যুক্তরাষ্ট্রের বিক্ষোভে সানিও হলেম বিভিন্ন দেশের অসংখ্য মানুষ। অস্ট্রেলিয়া, কোরিয়া, মালয়েশিয়া থেকে শুরু করে আরবদুনিয়া, ইউরোপের বিভিন্ন দেশে বিশেষ ইরাক-যুদ্ধের বিরুদ্ধে প্রতিবাদ জানিয়ে বহু মিছিল ও সমাবেশ হয়। কদিন আগেই মাদ্রিদে বিশাল বিক্ষোভের ঘটণায় ২০০ মানুষের মৃত্যুর কারণ হয়ে আল কায়দা জানিয়েছিল, আমেরিকার সঙ্গে হাত মিলিয়ে ইরাকে সেনা পাঠানোর জন্যই স্পেনে এই কাণ্ড ঘটানো হল। সেই মাদ্রিদে আজ বিশাল সমাবেশ হয়েছে ইরাক থেকে আমেরিকা এবং অন্য দেশের সেনা প্রত্যাহারের দাবিতে। সাদাম জমানার অবসানে ইরাক এবং অন্য দেশের জীবন আরও নিরাপদ হয়েছে বলে আমেরিকা যে আশ্বাস দিচ্ছে, তাতে আস্থা নেই বেশিরভাগ বিক্ষোভকারীরই। স্পেনের ভাবী প্রধানমন্ত্রী আলগোই জানিয়ে দিয়েছেন যে স্পেন ইরাক থেকে সেনা ফিরিয়ে আনবে। ক্রেয়ারের লন্ডনেও আজ বিশাল যুক্তরাষ্ট্রের বিক্ষোভ হয়েছে।

এদিকে বৃষ্ণ হোয়াইট হাউস থেকে 'ইরাক প্রথম বর্ষপূর্তি' ভাষণে বলেছেন, ইরাকের ভবিষ্যতের দায়িত্ব এখন বিশ্বের হাতে। আমেরিকা সন্ত্রাসের বিরুদ্ধে লড়াই চালিয়ে যাবে। স্পেনের প্রতি ইঙ্গিত করে বৃষ্ণ বলেন, সন্ত্রাসবাদের কাছে নতিস্বীকার করে কোনও লাভ হবে না। কিন্তু রাষ্ট্রপঞ্জের মহাসচিব কোফি আন্নান যত্নব্যব করেছেন, ইরাকে মার্কিন আগ্রাসনের পরেই সন্ত্রাসবাদ মাথা তুলেছে, আগে সে দেশে সন্ত্রাসবাদের তেমন অস্তিত্ব ছিল না। ইরাকে গত কদিন ধরেই গেরিলারা মার্কিন বাহিনী ও অসামরিক লক্ষ্যবস্তুর উপর রকেট-মর্টার-গাড়িবোমা নিয়ে হামলা বাড়িয়ে চলেছে। আজও মার্কিন সেনা দক্ষতরের সামনে রকেট আছড়ে পড়েছে। ইরাকের অবস্থা দেখে গোটা আরবদুনিয়ায় যে তোলপাড় চলছে তার কিছুটা আঁচ মিলেছে কুয়েতে। আরবদুনিয়ায় সামাজিক রাজনৈতিক সংস্কারের মার্কিনী প্রস্তাবে তেমন সাদা মেলেনি। মার্কিন বিশেষ সচিব কলিন পাওয়েল আরবদুনিয়ার একাধিক রাষ্ট্রনেতার সঙ্গে কথা বলার পরে কুয়েতে বলেছেন, আমেরিকা কোনও দেশকে জোরকরে গণতন্ত্র গেলাতে চায় না।

এদিকে, ইরাক-যুদ্ধের প্রথম বর্ষপূর্তিতে রাস্তায় নেমে যুক্তরাষ্ট্রের বিক্ষোভে সানিল হয়ে লন্ডনের বিগ বেন ক্লক টাওয়ারে উঠে পড়েন দুই বিক্ষোভকারী, তেমনই আবার ম্যানিলায় মার্কিন দুতাবাসের সামনে রায়ট পুলিশের সঙ্গে সংঘর্ষ বাধে প্রতিবাদী জনতার। বিক্ষোভ ঘিরে বড়সড় অশান্তির ঘটনায়ও কোথাও ঘটেনি।



বাগদাদে মার্কিন সেনার টহলদারি। শনিবার। — রয়টার্স

অস্ট্রেলিয়ার বৃহত্তম শহর সিডনিতে হাজার তিনেক মানুষ ইরাক থেকে সেনা সরানোর দাবিতে রাস্তায় নেমেছিলেন। তাদের হাতে ছিল খাঁচায় ভরা অস্ট্রেলীয় প্রধানমন্ত্রী জন হওয়ার্ডের 'পুতুল'-মাথা। ইরাকে আক্রমণের প্রশ্নে মার্কিন প্রেসিডেন্ট জর্জ বুশের কষ্টের সমর্থক হওয়ার্ডের কঠোর সমালোচনা হয়েছে সিডনির বিক্ষোভ সমাবেশে। চলচ্চিত্রকার সন্নর্ধক হওয়ার্ডের কঠোর সমালোচনা হয়েছে সিডনির বিক্ষোভ সমাবেশে। চলচ্চিত্রকার জন পিলগার ও অভিনেত্রী জুডি ডেভিস জমায়েতে বক্তৃতা দেন। জঙ্গি কার্যকলাপের দায়ে কিউবায় মার্কিন কারাগারে আটক অস্ট্রেলীয় নাগরিক ডেভিড হিকসের বাবাও সেখানে উপস্থিত ছিলেন। ব্রিসবেনে বিক্ষোভকারীরা নিয়ে এসেছিলেন ১০০ মিটার লম্বা একটি ব্যানার, যাতে লেখা ছিল 'আমরা এখনও বলছি, যুদ্ধ নয়' ('উই স্টিল সে নো টু ওয়ার')।

প্রসঙ্গত, মার্কিন আবেদনে সাদা দিয়ে ইরাকে ২০০০ সেনা এবং আঞ্চলিকভাবে বিশেষ বাহিনী পাঠিয়েছিল অস্ট্রেলিয়া।

আমেরিকার আর এক মিত্র রাষ্ট্র জাপানেও দেখা গিয়েছে একই বিক্ষোভের ছবি। ঠান্ডা আর বৃষ্টি উপেক্ষা করে কয়েক হাজার মানুষ মিছিল করে যান টোকিওর হিবিয়া পার্ক। তাঁদের স্লোগানে বলা হয় আমেরিকাকে ইরাক থেকে বাড়ি ফিরে' যেতে। মজার ব্যাপার হল, আজ যখন টোকিওর রাস্তায় এত মানুষ ইরাক থেকে জাপানি সেনা ফিরিয়ে আনার দাবি জানাচ্ছেন, তখনই কুয়েত সীমান্ত পেরিয়ে ইরাকে ঢুকেছে নতুন জাপানি বাহিনী। জাপানের সরকার যতই বলুক যুদ্ধবিরোধ ইরাকের পুনর্গঠনের কাজে সাহায্য করছে তাদের সেনা, সাধারণ মানুষ কিন্তু মাথার খুলির মুখোশ পরে সেনা প্রত্যাহারের দাবিই করে গিয়েছেন। 'স্ট্যাচু অব লিবার্টি'-র চৌখে জল, হাতে ধরা স্ক্রিপগান্ড— এমন চেহারাও আজ চোখে পড়েছে বিক্ষোভ মিছিলে।

দক্ষিণ কোরিয়ায় প্রতিবাদ ছিল বেশ শান্তই। সোলে হাজার দেড়েক কলেজ-পড়ুয়া যুক্তরাষ্ট্রের বাহিনী মিছিলে অংশ নেন। দক্ষিণ কোরিয়ার প্রেসিডেন্ট রো মু হুন-এর 'ইমপিচমেন্ট'-এর প্রতিবাদে সোলে বড় সমাবেশ হওয়ার কথা ছিল, তার আগেই মানুষ যুদ্ধের বিরুদ্ধে প্রতিবাদে নামেন। হকংয়ে বিক্ষোভ সমাবেশের উদ্যোক্তা ও গণতান্ত্রিক আন্দোলনের কর্মী লিউ সান-চিং বলেন, "বৃশের ইরাক আক্রমণই আরও সন্ত্রাসে প্ররোচনা দিয়েছে।" ব্যাঙ্ককে মার্কিন ও ব্রিটিশ দুতাবাসের সামনে বিক্ষোভ হয়েছে। এ দিকে, ব্রিটিশ বিদেশমন্ত্রী জ্যাক স্ট্র এক সাক্ষাৎকারে বলেছেন, আগেকার হুমকি গ্রাহ্য করে আরও আগেই আল কায়দার বিরুদ্ধে যুদ্ধ ঘোষণা করা উচিত ছিল। তা হলে আর ৯/১১ ঘটত না। স্পেনের ভাবী বিদেশমন্ত্রী মিশুয়েল মোরাতিনোস বলেছেন, ইরাক থেকে তাঁদের দেশের সেনা সরিয়ে আনার মানে সন্ত্রাসবিরোধী লড়াই থেকে পিছিয়ে আসা নয়। স্পেনের সরকারি সূত্রের খবর, মোরাতিনোসের সঙ্গে ফোনে কথা হয়েছে মার্কিন বিদেশসচিব কলিন পাওয়েলের এবং স্পেনের পক্ষ থেকে আমেরিকাকে বোঝানো হয়েছে যে, সন্ত্রাস রুখতে স্পেন আগের মতোই বন্ধপারিকর। এর পাশাপাশি সন্ত্রাস মোকাবিলায় ভারতের ভূমিকার কথা মনে নিয়েছেন মার্কিন প্রেসিডেন্ট জর্জ বুশ। হোয়াইট হাউসে ৮৪টি দেশের কূটনীতিকদের এক অনুষ্ঠানে বুশ বলেন, সন্ত্রাসবাদ কী বিপদ নিয়ে আসতে পারে, ভারত তা বোঝে এবং সে জন্য সন্ত্রাস রুখতে তারাও সচেষ্ট। — রয়টার্স, পি টি আই

Thousands protest on Iraq war anniversary

AP/REUTERS

Associated Press
Sydney, March 20

THOUSANDS OF protesters marched in Australian cities on Saturday while up to 30,000 rallied in Japan as they marked the first anniversary of the Iraq war and demanded the withdrawal of troops from Iraq.

Demonstrations were also held in New Zealand, Thailand and Hong Kong, where some claimed the Iraq war had incited more terrorism.

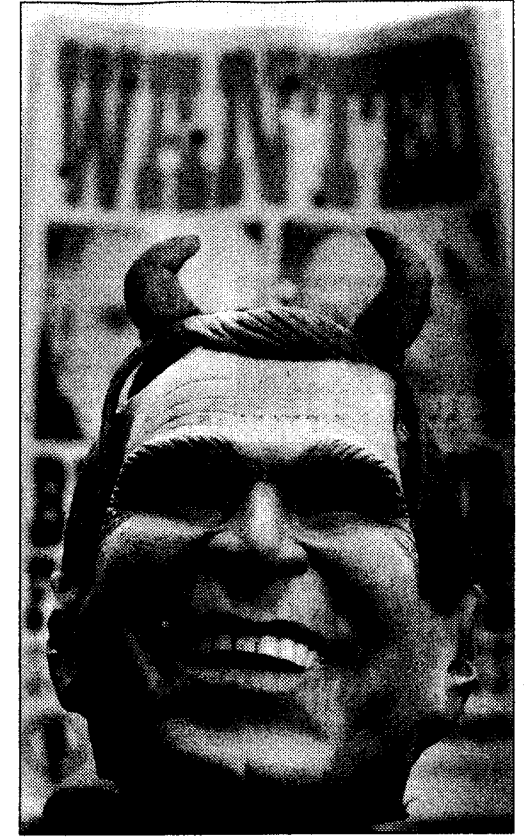
In Sydney, protesters held aloft a 1.5 metre-high puppet of Prime Minister John Howard in a cage to represent Australian terror suspects detained at the US military prison camp in Guantanamo Bay. The puppet also had a Pinocchio-like long nose, a reference to accusations the government lied about the reasons for going to war.

"By the end of this 24-hour cycle, millions of people will have marched throughout the world asking their governments not to take them to war and to give them peace," Pamela Curr, an organiser of the Sydney protest, told reporters.

Howard and his government have been unstinting supporters of US President George W. Bush and his government in the war on terror, fighting in both Iraq and Afghanistan.

Australia sent 2,000 troops to fight in Iraq despite overwhelming public opposition to the war and still has 850 military personnel in the country.

Anna Sampson, one of the demonstrators, said, "It's an election year and I think it's time the Howard government was held to account." Australia expects to go to the polls later this year. But the number of protesters was well short of the 200,000 or so who turned out in Sydney alone for an



Anti-war demonstrations were carried out all over the world on Saturday — London's Big Ben (left), London's Trafalgar Square (centre) and Glasgow.

BIGGER THAN BIG BEN: Two anti-war demonstrators climbed to top of London's landmark Big Ben clock tower early on Saturday, as opponents of the US and British invasion of Iraq prepared to mark its first anniversary with a rally. 'Officers are at the scene trying to bring the protest to a peaceful solution,' a spokesman for Scotland Yard said. Police said they did not believe there was reason to fear a terrorist incident. Sky channel showed pictures of two men, perched at the tower more than 45 metres from the ground

BUSH EYED BOMBING OF IRAQ ON 9/11: A former White House anti-terrorism adviser says the Bush administration considered bombing Iraq in retaliation after September 11, 2001 even though it was clear the al-Qaida had carried out the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. Richard Clarke, who headed a cyber-security board that gleaned intelligence from the Internet, said he was surprised administration officials turned immediately toward Iraq instead of al-Qaida and Osama bin Laden

anti-war protest a year ago.

Organisers in Tokyo said as many as 30,000 people turned out in the Japanese capital to protest their country's involvement in the war. Japan has sent 1,000 personnel to Iraq, its largest foreign deployment since the Second World War. Waving placards reading 'Drop Bush, Not Bombs!'

protesters marched three km in the rain.

In Hong Kong, protest organiser and pro-democracy activist Lau San-ching said "Bush's invasion of Iraq has incited more terrorism. It caused terrible suffering not only to the Iraqi people, but everyone in the world."

In Thailand, dozens of people protested in front of

the American and British embassies in Bangkok, carrying signs that read "End the war before war ends humanity," and "Thai troops come home."

Thailand has sent a humanitarian mission of some 450 troops as part of the multi-national force of 9,500 soldiers in south central Iraq. It has the tenth

largest deployment of troops there.

"This protest represents the feelings of many Thais. I think most Thais are very uncomfortable with Thai troops in Iraq," said protest organiser Giles Ungpakorn.

Reuters adds marches were expected in Europe and the Americas later in

the day. A big turnout is expected in Madrid, still shaken from the bomb attacks many blamed on Spain's role in the Iraq war.

Incoming Spanish Prime Minister Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero has pledged to pull Spanish troops out of Iraq, calling the war a "disaster" and a "fiasco".

Polish President feels 'misled' on Iraq

HD-16 W/S
WARSAW, MARCH 19. The Polish President, Aleksander Kwasniewski, who has allied his nation strongly with the Bush administration in the war on Iraq, has said he felt 'misled' by information about weapons of mass destruction that have not been found there.

The apparent criticism, the first he has made in public, did not seem to signal any shift in policy for Poland, which this week vowed to keep the roughly 2,500 troops it has sent to Iraq there. Still, in comments to reporters here, he seemed at least to acknowledge Poles' discomfort with its military role in Iraq, especially after the bombings last week against Spain, another American ally in Iraq.

"Naturally, one may protest the reasons for the war action

in Iraq," he said, answering a reporter's question. "I personally think that today, Iraq without Saddam Hussein is a truly better Iraq than with Saddam Hussein."

"But naturally I also feel uncomfortable due to the fact that we were misled with the information on weapons of mass destruction," he said, according to a transcript released by the President's office.

Mr. Kwasniewski did not directly blame the Bush administration, faulting instead intelligence lapses that affected America, Britain and other nations. He did not, however, back away from the word 'misled,' repeating it at a second news conference later even after it was reported as criticism of the war effort.

He also suggested in a radio interview that, because of what he said was progress in bringing stability to Iraq, Polish troops may be able to begin withdrawing near the start of 2005, earlier than previous estimates that it would be possible only by mid-year.

Opinion polls show most Poles oppose the presence of their troops in Iraq, but the issue has not become a central dynamic in the nation's politics. — *New York Times News Service*

Seoul cancels plan

South Korea has scrubbed plans to send troops to the northern Iraqi city of Kirkuk, citing U.S. pressure to participate in "offensive operations," but it will still send the forces to help rebuild the country,

said the Defence Ministry today, AP reports from Seoul.

The Ministry said it was looking for another location to send the promised 3,600 forces.

Seoul's dispatch, making South Korea the biggest coalition partner after the United States and Britain, was scheduled to come as early as next month. But today's decision means the mission might be delayed.

The move comes as other allies in the Iraq coalition reconsider their contributions. Spain's new Government made its pullout threat shortly after winning elections on Sunday, three days after bombings in Madrid, possibly by Al-Qaeda-linked terrorists retaliating for Spain's allegiance with the United States.

20 MAR 2004

THE HINDU

20 MAR 2004

Iraq toll doubles in bloody 24 hrs

Forces on alert

for anniversary

Baghdad, March 18 (Reuters): Nine civilians were killed in fresh violence in Iraq today when guerrillas mounted attacks two days before the first anniversary of the start of the US-led war to oust Saddam Hussein.

A British military spokesman in Basra said four Iraqis were killed in an explosion outside the southern city's Mirbad Hotel. A child was one of at least two people wounded, witnesses said.

Three employees of a US-funded television station were shot dead at Baquba, northeast of Baghdad, and two Iraqis, including a child, were killed in fighting between guerrillas and US troops in another restive town, Falluja.

Guerrillas have targeted Iraqis seen as cooperating with US-led occupying forces, who blame Saddam supporters and foreign Islamic militants for attacks.

The Basra attack occurred only hours after a suicide car bomber killed seven people, including a British engineer, at a hotel in Baghdad last night. US officials blamed that attack on Muslim militants, possibly linked to al Qaida.

Occupying forces are on alert for an increase in violence in the

run-up to Saturday's anniversary of the invasion on March 20 last year that toppled Saddam.

US President George W. Bush's administration stepped up vows that guerrilla attacks would not deflect it from its goal of bringing about a democracy in Iraq. "Terrorists in Iraq seek to break the will of the Iraqi people. They believe that if they spill enough Iraqi blood they can halt Iraq's progress to democracy. They are wrong," Iraq's US governor Paul Bremer said in a statement.

Basra, a stronghold of Iraq's majority Shias long oppressed under Saddam, has had fewer attacks than Baghdad and Sunni areas like Falluja and Baquba near the capital. The hotel had been regularly used for news briefings by the British military and by the civilian administration of Iraq's second city.

The British military spokesman said it was not clear whether a car bomb or explosives planted in the street caused the blast.

Basra residents said an angry crowd had beaten to death a man suspected of being behind the attack.

The British military said it was aware of the reports but could not confirm them.



A Japanese colonel jokes with an Iraqi boy in the village of Khodr southeast of Karbala. (AFP)

Madrid, March 18 (Reuters): Spanish police arrested two Moroccans and two others today as they investigated last week's suspected al Qaida-linked Madrid train bombings that killed 201 people, judicial sources said.

State radio said one of those arrested was suspected of playing a direct role in the Madrid bombings and was also wanted over last May's Casablanca bombings — the latest indication investigators believe the two attacks are linked. Three of the four were detained near Alcala de Henares, a commuter town near Madrid where the trains bombed a week ago picked up passengers.

The fourth unidentified man — detained in the northern city of Gijon — was the one state radio said was linked to both the Madrid and Casablanca attacks. They are the first arrests in the case since Saturday's detention of three Moroccans and two Indians, who were facing a closed-door preliminary hearing at which a judge will decide whether to release them or keep them in custody. More than 1,750 people were also injured in the Madrid attacks, western Europe's bloodiest guerrilla attack since the 1988 Lockerbie plane bomb.

Interior minister Angel Acebes said the investigation was making progress and at an important stage, but gave few details. "There are results... Some of those arrested have been handed over to the courts and other arrests are happening," he told a news conference after the weekly cabinet meeting. Court sources said Spanish High Court judge Baltasar Garzon opened a secret investigation into the Casablanca bombings the day after they occurred in May last year. The Casablanca blasts killed 45 people, including 12 suicide bombers. Four Spaniards were among the dead.

Blast flattens Baghdad hotel

Toll 27, mostly Arabs, and mounting by the hour

Agencies

Baghdad, March 17

A POWERFUL blast ripped through a hotel and houses in central Baghdad on Wednesday night, killing at least 27 people and injuring 41.

As bodies were pulled out from the burning rubble of the Mount Lebanon Hotel in Karrada district, witnesses said the casualties included children and the toll could rise. Iraqi police said it appeared to have been a rocket attack but other reports suggested a car bomb or a suicide attacker caused the blast.

Most of the hotel guests were



AFF
A blast victim being taken to hospital.

Iraqis and other Arabs. A US army colonel said some of the victims were Americans and Britons.

The blast sent up a column of fire

and a huge plume of smoke into the night sky. Frantic relatives gathered as rescue teams searched for survivors and US military helicopters hovered above.

The explosion left an 8-foot-wide and 10-foot-deep crater and badly damaged five adjacent buildings.

US Army 1st Armoured Division's Heath Balick said: "It has to be a car bomb. No rocket could cause that amount of damage." The division is responsible for Baghdad's security. But several residents said it was a rocket attack. "We saw the tail of a rocket, then we saw a big flash and heard a big boom," said a resident.

THE HINDU

18 MAR 2004

A RESOUNDING WIN FOR THE SOCIALISTS

Spanish PM-elect to recall troops from Iraq

MADRID, MARCH 15. Moving to fulfil a campaign pledge, the leader of Spain's victorious Socialists said today that he would bring Spanish troops home from Iraq by June 30.

Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero spoke hours after voters ousted the conservative Government, accused of provoking the Madrid railway bombings by backing the Iraq war. The attacks killed 200 people and wounded some 1,500.

"The Spanish troops which are in Iraq will be returning home," Mr. Zapatero told Cadena Ser radio. He said the troops would be recalled once he put together a government some time in mid-April and formally took over as Prime Minister.

However, a party spokesman explained to the Associated Press that Mr. Zapatero stuck to his campaign condition that the 1,300 troops would stay if the United Nations assumed control of the peacekeeping operation in Iraq.

In Sunday's general elections, the Socialist Workers' Party defeated the ruling Popular Party, jumping from 125 seats to 164 in the 350-member Congress of Deputies. The conservatives fell from 183 to 148.

The conservatives' defeat was unexpected. Pre-election polls had predicted the Popular Party, led by Mariano Rajoy, would win comfortably. But when the ballots were tallied, the Socialists netted 10.9 million to the PP's 9.6 million. The turnout was 77 per cent.

The circumstances were exceptional. Thursday's train bombing, reportedly claimed by the Al-Qaeda, was followed by demonstrations the next day that drew millions across Spain. Then the Government of Prime Minister Jose Maria Aznar was accused of misleading voters by insisting that the armed Basque separatists were the prime suspects even as evidence mounted of an Islamic link. — AP

Editorial on Page 10
A vote against war: Page 16



Jose Rodriguez Zapatero, leader of the Socialist Party that won Spain's general elections, greeting supporters outside the party headquarters in Madrid on Sunday. — Reuters

Iran lifts freeze

WAK
Tehran, March 15 (Reuters): Iran will allow the resumption of UN nuclear inspections, which it halted last week in protest at a tough resolution on its atomic programme, Iran's chief nuclear negotiator was quoted as saying

Gr S
today. Iran's decision to freeze nuclear inspections has fuelled US charges Tehran is trying to hide parts of its extensive nuclear sector because it has a secret programme to build an atom bomb. Negotiator Hassan Rohani, secretary-general of Iran's Supreme National Security Council, did not specify when inspectors from the UN's International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) would be allowed back.

"We will definitely reach an agreement with the agency on the resumption of inspections," the official Irna news agency quoted Rohani as saying ahead of an official visit to Japan.

However, the IAEA chief Mohamed ElBaradei said he spoke with the Iranians today and they told him the freeze on inspections would be lifted so they could resume on March 27.

Iran suspends inspections after UN rap

CRAIG S. SMITH
PARIS, MARCH 14

IRAN suspended international inspections of its nuclear facilities on Saturday in an angry response to a resolution by the UN atomic agency that criticized its activities.

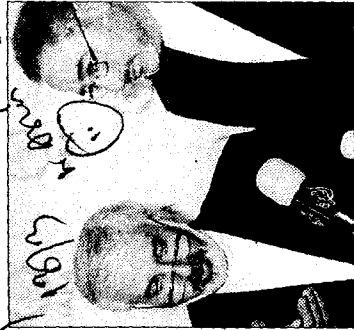
The suspension came after a week of negotiations at the Vienna headquarters of the IAEA, where Iran sought to quash and then soften international censure of its failure to fully disclose its clandestine nuclear program to the world.

"Today, IAEA inspectors were expected to arrive in Iran," Iran's top nuclear negotiator, Hassan

ing. "I'm confident that Iran will understand that we need to go within the time scheduled, and the decision to delay the inspection will be reviewed and reversed within the next couple of days."

If inspections are not resumed soon, tension between Washington and Tehran is likely to be heightened, and the atomic energy agency might offer even harsher criticism when its board of governors meets again in June.

Kenneth Brill, the chief US delegate to the meeting, said that he suspected the freeze was an attempt by Iran to gain time and hide its activities before allowing agency



IAEA ambassador Pirooz Hossaini with Iran's Zamani Nja in Vienna. Reuters

a protest by Iran in reaction to the passage of the resolution."

are working at still undeclared sites to tile over, paint over, burn or cart away incriminating evidence, so that those sanitized locations can finally be identified to the agency as new evidence of Iran's full cooperation and transparency," he asked.

A spokesman for the IAEA said the agency expected Iran to set a new date for inspections before it caused further damage to the relationship. "Every state has a right to work with us on the timing of inspections, and even our agreements allow for holidays and that sort of thing," he said. "We believe we're going get back on track based on the fact that we've been working

Iran threat to UN agency

Tehran
9-9 103
Tehran, March 9 (Reuters): Angered by tough remarks by the head of the UN's atomic watchdog, conservative Iranian politicians warned that Tehran may cease cooperation with nuclear inspectors, newspapers reported today.

The attitude of conservative legislators, who regained control of parliament from reformists in elections last month, could jeopardise ratification of an agreement signed by Iran last year to allow intrusive snap checks of its nuclear facilities.

International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) chief Mohamed El-Baradei criticised Iran yesterday for failing to declare advanced nuclear research and equipment which could be used to make atomic bombs. One senior conservative legislator said Iran could follow North Korea's example by pulling out of the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). "Iran's threat about opting out of the NPT is serious," Hassan Qashqavi, member of parliament's National Security and Foreign Policy Committee, was quoted as saying by the hardline *Siyasat-e Rouz* newspaper. He said the IAEA board of governors' meeting which began in Vienna yesterday had been hijacked by US interests.

"The pressure from America is mainly political and is aimed at depriving Iran of nuclear knowledge," he said. "This will lead Iran to reconsider its nuclear cooperation." Iran insists its nuclear programme is aimed at generating electricity, not making bombs as Washington alleges. Hardliners' objections to cooperation with nuclear inspectors had been more muted in recent months following Iran's decision last October, under intense international pressure, to agree to snap inspections, halt uranium enrichment and cooperate more closely with the IAEA.

Iranian officials last week called for the IAEA to remove Iran's nuclear programme from its agenda, arguing that Tehran had done enough to prove it had no nuclear arms ambitions.

10 MAR 2004

THE TELEGRAPH

Iraqi Shiites to press for say in transitional government

By Jal Taraporevala
TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Mumbai: Although the mainline Iraqi Shiite parties have accepted the country's interim constitution, they will maintain the pressure on the



Ali Sistani

US since they have serious reservations on the subject. The leading Shiite cleric in Iraq, Ayatollah Ali Sistani, and the largest party, the Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI), will press their demand for the process of choosing the members of the transitional government to be made more accountable either through partial elections or a transparent caucus system.

Given the fact that the Shiites constitute around 60 per cent of the population of Iraq, it is in the interests of SCIRI to ensure that direct polls precede the final drafting of a new constitution next year—something which has been envisaged in the interim basic law of the country. This will enable SCIRI to have a substantial say in finalising the details of such key aspects of a new political dispensation in Iraq as the precise role of Islam, the devolution of powers to the provinces and the charter of the fundamental rights of citizens. In addition, Ayatollah Sistani and SCIRI will continue to argue for the UN to be allowed to play an important consultative role during the transitional period as a means of reducing US influence and giving international legiti-

macy to the entire process.

How far these objectives are achieved is uncertain. After all, the UN is unlikely to play a crucial role partly on account of the unstable security situation in Iraq but largely because of deep US misgivings on the issue. Besides, whether direct polls can be organised before a detailed constitution is drawn up next year will hinge on such factors as the security situation in the country, the drafting of an election law and the preparation of electoral rolls. More important, even if such elections are held, the Kurds and Sunnis can be expected to continue to insist on guarantees that the Shiites will not use their numerical majority to draft constitutional provisions that run counter to the interest of the other ethnic groups.

Iraqis ink interim charter

Adrian 9-20-04

Associated Press

BAGHDAD, March 8. — Iraq's Governing Council signed a landmark interim Constitution today after resolving a political impasse sparked by objections from the country's most powerful cleric. The signing was a key step in US plans to hand over power to the Iraqis by 1 July.

Before an audience of prominent Iraqi and US civilian and military officers, including the top administrator in Iraq, Mr L Paul Bremer, the 25 council members signed the document on an antique desk once owned by King Faisal I, Iraq's first monarch.

Council President Md Bahr al-Ulloum called the signing a "historic moment, decisive in the history of Iraq". Mr Massoud Barzani, a Kurdish leader on the council, said: "There is no doubt that this document will strengthen Iraqi unity in a way never seen before... This is the first time that we Kurds feel that we are citizens of Iraq."

The signing came nine days after a deadline set in a US timetable. The delay was caused by a mourning period following deadly bomb attacks on Shi'ite shrines, as well as political wrangling on the US-

The charter includes a 13-article bill of rights, enshrines Islam as a basis of law, outlines the shape of a parliament and presidency, and provides a federal structure for the country. It will remain in effect till a permanent Constitution is approved by a national referendum planned for late 2005

create the government that will take power on 30 June and serve until national polls due by 31 January — a task that will need help from the UN.

Today's ceremony was a sign of unity after a similar ceremony planned for Friday fell apart when five of the council's 13 Shi'ite members refused to sign the document because Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Husseini al-Sistani objected to a key clause requested by the Kurds.



GETTING ONE PAST THE IRAQIS: Mr Paul Bremer kicks a ball during training of the Iraqi Olympic Soccer team in Baghdad. — PTI

picked council. The impasse strained relations between Sunni, Shi'ite and Kurdish leaders and highlighted the power of Iraq's Shi'ite clergy.

The charter — which includes a 13-article bill of rights, enshrines Islam as one of the bases of law and outlines the shape of a parliament and presidency as well as a federal structure for Iraq. It will remain in effect until a permanent Constitution is approved by a national referendum planned for late 2005.

About an hour before the signing ceremony began, insurgents fired mortar shells at two police stations in central Baghdad, injuring four people, including one policeman, Iraqi officials said.

Iraqi and US officials still must agree on a method to

Iraqi Council signs interim Constitution

JOSEPH LOGAN
BAGHDAD, MARCH 8

IRAQ'S Governing Council signed an interim Constitution on Monday, a key step towards a planned handover of sovereignty by US-led occupation forces to Iraqis on June 30.

The signing took place at a hastily arranged ceremony in Baghdad, after Shi'ite members of the 25-member Council dropped their objections to the document over the weekend.

Just before the signing, loud explosions echoed across central Baghdad. At least one of the blasts was caused by a rocket hitting a house, witnesses said, adding that there were no casualties. The US Army said it had no immediate information.

The signing had been delayed twice — first by bomb attacks on Shi'ites last Tuesday that killed at least 181 people, and then by last-minute doubts among Shi'ites that forced a high-profile ceremony on Friday to be abandoned.

Representatives of the five



A US soldier stands guard in Baghdad on Sunday after guerrillas fired 10 rockets at the US-led administration's HQ. Reuters

groups that backed out on Friday spent the weekend in the holy city of Najaf, talking with top clerics, including Ayatollah Ali Al-Sistani, who wields immense influence over Iraq's 60 per cent Shi'ite majority.

They announced on Sunday that Sistani still had deep reservations about the document, but had given them the go-ahead to sign it in the interests of advancing political transition.

Under a US timetable, an

Iraqi government is to take over sovereignty on June 30 and elections for a transitional Assembly are to be held by the end of January next year.

Mahmoud Othman, an independent Kurdish member of the Council, said before the ceremony that the document was to be signed without changes.

The main point of dispute had been a clause in the Constitution that may allow Iraq's Kurdish minority to veto a planned

Main points of the interim statute

- Elections for a transitional Assembly will be held by the end of January 2005 at the latest. That Assembly will draft the permanent Constitution.
- There will also be an unelected government.
- No decision made on the shape of the caretaker government, which will take over on June 30.
- Full elections should be held by the end of 2005, once a permanent Constitution is ready.
- Islam is the official religion but is not the primary source for legislation.
- The document includes a comprehensive Bill of Human Rights.
- The target for female seats in the new Assembly is 25 per cent.
- Iraq will be a federal state. The exact relationship of the provinces, including the Kurdish area, to central authority has not been decided.
- Kurdish officials say there is still a provision allowing them to maintain their militias for the moment.

—Reuters

Hakim, who is the son of a top Najaf cleric and sat in on the discussions over the weekend, said clerics were unhappy with the document, but understood its importance.

"The religious authorities have made their position clear to the politicians, but don't want to interfere directly," Hakim said. "They have deep reservations, but also know this interim Constitution is a step in the right direction."

Others present said Sistani would have liked to push for changes, but felt the furthest he could go was to make his objections clear and leave it up to the politicians to do what they felt necessary.

Sistani, a 73-year-old Iranian-born religious scholar, has increasingly exerted his influence on politics in recent months.

He has expressed objections to the US timetable for handing back power, forcing the Americans to bring forward planned elections. Sistani was also strongly against giving the Kurds veto power over a permanent Constitution.

—Reuters

strife with Sunni Muslims.

US troops and Iraqi security forces in Baghdad were on high alert against any attempt by guerrillas to disrupt the signing of the Constitution.

On Sunday evening, police said 10 rockets were fired at the headquarters of the US-led administration in Baghdad, close to where the document was to be signed. There were no serious injuries.

Mohammed Hussein al-

permanent Constitution if it does not enshrine their right to autonomy in three northern provinces.

The Kurds, who have ruled three provinces of northern Iraq since wresting them from Saddam Hussein's control after the 1991 Gulf War, had said that if the clause was not included, they would not sign. The issue risked opening a new rift among Iraq's ethnic and religious groups.

Last week's bomb attacks on Shi'ites raised fears of sectarian

Iraq Constitution 'deal reached'

Associated Press

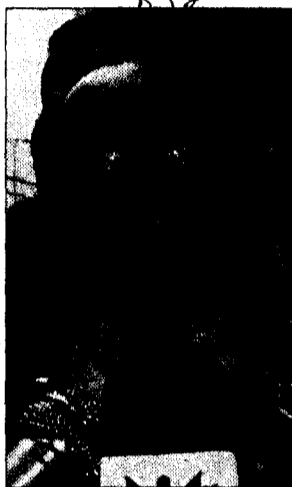
BAGHDAD, March 7. — Shi'ite politicians who delayed the signing of Iraq's interim Constitution said they will sign the document without any changes tomorrow, despite the reservations of the country's top Shi'ite cleric.

Five Shi'ite members of the Iraqi Governing Council met Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Husseini al-Sistani at his home in the holy city of Najaf today to discuss how to resolve the impasse over the Constitution.

The five had refused to sign the constitution on Friday because of Al-Sistani's objections — angering other members, some of whom saw the move as a Shi'ite attempt to grab more power. Sunni and Kurd council members refused to change the charter. After the Najaf talks today, it appeared the Shi'ites were backing down in their refusal.

"Al-Sistani has reservations, but it will not constitute an obstacle," said Md Hussein Bahr al-Ulloum, who helped coordinate the talks on behalf of his father, council President Md Bahr al-Ulloum. "It will be signed as it was agreed upon before by the Governing Council members."

The approval of an



After meeting Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Husseini al-Sistani on Sunday, Shi'ite politician Mr Mouwafak al-Rubaie (above) said the interim Constitution will be signed without changes on Monday. — AFP

interim constitution is a key step in the US-backed plan to hand over power to the Iraqis on June 30. The document will remain in effect until the end of 2005 after a permanent charter is approved.

The Shi'ite politicians said they were optimistic the Constitution will be signed tomorrow. "The news is very good and we are going to sign it tomorrow," council member Mr Mouwafak al-Rubaie said today. "We are glad that the grand ayatollah understood our position."

The council was to meet tomorrow morning to dis-

cuss the results of the talks with Al-Sistani. Mr Salem Chalabi — a top adviser in the Iraqi National Congress, a political party whose leader refused to sign on Friday.

The dispute illustrated the influence that the 75-year-old grand ayatollah, who rarely leaves his home in the holy city of Najaf, holds over the political process. The interim Constitution had been agreed to unanimously by the council at the beginning of the week. But with the ayatollah opposing the deal, five out of 13 Shi'ite members refused to sign only hours before a ceremony was to take place, breaking unity on the body and embarrassing US officials.

The main dispute was over a clause that would have given Iraq's Kurds the power to scuttle a permanent Constitution when it comes up for a referendum in late 2005.

Baghdad blasts

At least 10 rockets were detonated tonight in central Baghdad, near an area that houses the headquarters of the US-led coalition. Sirens blared for several minutes, and smoke and flames were briefly visible. The former ministry of foreign affairs was on fire, a witness said. There was no immediate word on casualties.

USA, Europe divided over Iran's nuclear intentions

10-11-79
Mr. Rowhani

Associated Press

VIENNA, March 7. — Disputes over Iran's nuclear intentions — and what to do about them — left the USA and key European nations struggling for compromise today, the eve of a key meeting of the UN atomic watchdog agency.

Convinced that Teheran at one point wanted to make nuclear weapons, Washington wants tough language to dominate any resolution adopted by the board of governors meeting of the International Atomic Energy Agency that opens tomorrow.

Germany, Britain and

France, however, seek emphasis on the progress Iran has made in revealing nuclear activities and cooperating with IAEA inspectors since the discovery last year of a secret uranium enrichment program and covert tests that could be applied toward making nuclear weapons.

Even as negotiators met today in an attempt to find common language, a senior Iranian official demanded an end to the board's scrutiny of its nuclear activities, insisting in that they were never geared toward making arms.

"Iran's dossier has to be completely taken out of the IAEA board of governors'

agenda," said Mr Hasan Rowhani, Iran's top nuclear negotiator who also chairs the powerful Supreme National Security Council. The other goal, is to have Iran recognised globally as having the right to enrich uranium, Mr Rowhani told senior officials in Teheran.

While insisting it is interested in enrichment only to generate power and not to arm warheads, Iran has suspended its enrichment program after months of international pressure. Still, it insists it has every right to resume such activities, despite international demands that Iranian enrichment be scrapped instead of only sus-

pended.

MAR 20

বিষাদ সিন্ধু

১৫ মার্চ ২০০৪

কারবালার প্রান্তর আবার রক্তাক্ত। রক্তাক্ত বাগদাদের মসজিদ চত্বরও। ইমাম হোসেনের শহাদতের উদ্‌যাপনের জন্য নির্দিষ্ট পবিত্র মহরমের শোকোৎসব এবার কেবল ১৩২৪ বছর আগেকার শোক-স্মৃতি উজ্জীবিত করিয়াই সাজ হইল না, ইরাকেই শিশু, মহিলা সহ অন্তত দুই শত শিয়ার প্রাণহানিতে মর্মান্তিক হইয়া উঠিল। একই দিনে পাকিস্তানের কোয়েটায় মহরমের শোক-মিছিলে বন্দুকবাজদের গুলিতে প্রায় ৫০ জনের মৃত্যু এবং দেড় শতাব্দির জখম হওয়ার ঘটনা কিংবা আফগানিস্তানে মহরম মিছিলে আততায়ীদের হানাদারির মধ্যে পর্যবেক্ষকেরা ইতিহাস-সিদ্ধ শিয়া-সুন্নি বিরোধের প্রতিফলন খুঁজিতেছেন। ইসলামের ভুবনে এই বিরোধ নূতন নয়। ইরান এবং ইরাক ছাড়া আর সব মুসলিমপ্রধান রাষ্ট্রেই শিয়ারা সংখ্যালঘু এবং সুন্নি কটরপন্থীদের নিগ্রহের শিকার। কিন্তু চারটি মুসলিম দেশে একই দিনে এ ধরনের সমসাময়িক হাঙ্গামায় ইসলামি সন্ত্রাসবাদীদের সুসমন্বিত আক্রমণের মার্কিন তত্ত্বটি পরিপাক করা কঠিন। আল কায়দা হোক কিংবা জর্ডনের আবু মুসাব, এই সব হামলার পিছনে কাহার হাত থাকা সম্ভব, সে বিষয়ে অনুমানের ঘুড়ি উড়ানো নিরর্থক। আলাদা ভাবে সুন্নি জেহাদীদের শিয়া-বিরূপতার ক্রিয়া অশ্বেষণ করাও বৃথা। ইরাকে শিয়া ধর্মগুরু আয়াতোল্লা আলি আল-সিন্তানি পর্যন্ত সুন্নি জঙ্গিদের জড়িত থাকার গুজব উড়াইয়া দিয়াছেন।

ষাট শতাংশ শিয়া জনসংখ্যার ইরাকে সুন্নি সাদ্দাম হুসেন মহরমের মতো ধর্মীয় পরব উদ্‌যাপন নিষিদ্ধ করিয়া দিয়াছিলেন। সাদ্দাম-মুক্ত ইরাকের শিয়ারা কারবালার প্রান্তরে সমবেত হওয়ায় সাদ্দামপন্থীরা শোধ লইয়াছে, এ হেন তত্ত্বও শিয়া ধর্মগুরুরা মানিতে নারাজ। কেবল শিয়া পরব নহে, ধর্মকে রাজনীতি ও রাষ্ট্রনীতির অঙ্গন হইতে নির্বাসিত করার প্রক্রিয়ায় 'বাথ' সমাজতন্ত্রী সাদ্দাম সব ধর্মীয় অনুষ্ঠানের প্রতিই রক্তচক্ষু দেখাইতেন। শিয়া ধর্মগুরুরা এই আক্রমণে শিয়া-সুন্নি বিবাদকে গৃহযুদ্ধে পরিণত করার ষড়যন্ত্রের আঁচ পাইয়াছেন। তবে আশ্চর্যের বিষয়, ষড়যন্ত্রের জন্য তাঁহারা মার্কিন প্রশাসন কিংবা তাহার অনুগত ইরাকি পরিষদের কথামতো সাদ্দাম-অনুগামী কিংবা আল-কায়দা জঙ্গি নহে, দায়ী করিতেছেন মার্কিন প্রশাসনকেই। ইঙ্গ-মার্কিন দখলদার বাহিনীর উপস্থিতি, মার্কিন নৌসেনাদের

দাপাদাপি এবং সার্বভৌম ইসলামি রাষ্ট্রে পশ্চিমী ধাঁচের গণতন্ত্র আরোপের প্রয়াসই তাহাদের মতে গোটা পরিস্থিতির জন্য দায়ী। ইহার সারবত্তা লইয়া বিতর্ক থাকিতে পারে, কিন্তু অভিযোগ হইতে এ কথা স্পষ্ট, মার্কিন প্রশাসনকে ইসলামি দুনিয়া ত্রাতা বলিয়া গণ্য করে না। বছ বার ইরাক ছাড়িবার জন্য 'বিদেশি আগ্রাসনকারীদের' কাছে আবেদন জানাইয়াছেন সে দেশের জনতা ও ধর্মীয় নেতৃবর্গ। সাদ্দামের মতো স্বৈরাচারীর অনুপস্থিতির ফলে সৃষ্ট শূন্যতা এবং লক্ষ-লক্ষ বিদেশি সৈন্যের অন্য এক স্বৈরশাসন ইরাকের মতো সুপ্রাচীন সভ্যতার পীঠভূমিতে যে জনজাতীয়, প্রশাসনিক, সাংস্কৃতিক ও সামাজিক-রাজনৈতিক জটিলতা রচনা করে, তাহাতে এ ধরনের ঘটনা অস্বাভাবিক নয়।

জর্জ ডব্লিউ বুশের বিশ্ববীক্ষা তাঁহার পাশ্চাত্য মিত্ররাই প্রত্যাখ্যান করিয়াছে। ইসলাম দুনিয়া তো কোনও মতেই তাহা শিরোধার্য করিবে না। পশ্চিমী গণতন্ত্র ও তাহার আনুষঙ্গিক ধারণাগুলিকে সব দেশে সাধারণ ভাবে প্রয়োগেই যে গণতান্ত্রিক বহুত্ববাদের মূল ধারণাটির বিরুদ্ধাচরণ নিহিত আছে, তা অনেক প্রবল গণতন্ত্রী মনে রাখেন না। আফগানিস্তানের জনজাতীয় সংঘাতময় বহুমাত্রিক সমাজে আফগান গণতন্ত্রের (লেয়া জিরগা) সঙ্গে এক ধরনের আপস চলিলেও ইরাকে সরাসরি পশ্চিমী ধাঁচের নিয়মতান্ত্রিক প্রতিনিধিত্বমূলক গণতন্ত্রের বন্দোবস্ত কয়েমের চেষ্ঠা বিকৃত হইতে বাধ্য। এই বিকৃতিরই একটি রূপ মার্কিন নৌসেনাদের উপর, পরে মার্কিন তত্ত্বাবধানে গড়িয়া ওঠা 'বশংবদ' ইরাকি, পুলিশ ও নিরাপত্তা রক্ষীদের উপর একের পর এক হানা। বুশের মোদ্ধারা যত শীঘ্র ইরাকিদের হাতে ইরাকের ভাগ্য সঁপিয়া ফিরিতে পারেন, ততই মঙ্গল। আগ্রাসনের সময় নিহত মার্কিন সেনার চেয়ে অনেক বেশি সেনা ইরাকে 'গণতন্ত্র আনিতে গিয়া' প্রাণ হারাইয়াছেন। সংখ্যাটি ক্রমশ বাড়িবে। আমেরিকা ইরাককে দ্বিতীয় ভিয়েতনাম বানাইতে চলিয়াছে কি না, সেই প্রশ্ন ক্রমশই জোরদার হইতেছে। পাকিস্তানে মার্কিন মিত্ররা ক্ষমতাসীন, নহিলে এখানেও আল কায়দার খোঁজে মার্কিন সেনা তৎপর হইত। কোয়েটার হিংসা অবশ্য প্রমাণ করে নিরাপত্তা লইয়া ভারতীয় ক্রিকেট দলের উদ্বেগ অমূলক নয়। জঙ্গিরা ইচ্ছা করিলেই যে কোনও স্থানে হামলা করতে পারে, এহ বপন্নতা সংক্রমণ হইতেছে। সমগ্র উপমহাদেশের পক্ষে ইঙ্গ-উদ্বেগজনক।

8 MAR 2004

Shia concerns delay signing of Iraqi Constitution

By Atul Aneja

MANAMA, MARCH 6. Declining to accept any major curbs on their power in a post-war Government, Iraqi Shias have stalled the adoption of an interim constitution that was being signed on Friday. Intense behind the scenes activity is now going on so that the Iraqi interim charter can be passed on Monday. Shia politicians are expected to consult Iraq's top Shia spiritual leader, Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani on Saturday, before deciding on their stance.

Preparations for Friday's signing ceremony had been completed. A children's choir group had been assembled and an antique desk was brought in for the occasion. But the interim constitution could not be adopted as the five Shia members of the U.S. appointed Iraqi Governing Council, whose signatures were required, failed to show up. Iraqi Shias have apparently raised two major objections to the existing draft. First, they have rejected a provision that allows minorities to veto a permanent constitution.

The draft reportedly said that two-thirds of voters in any of the three Kurdish provinces could veto the permanent charter through a referendum. Iraqi Shias, who are in majority in Iraq, and are likely to emerge as the key players in a new government have found this clause unacceptable. "Some of these provinces have only 400,000 or 500,000 people. We cannot have that number of people rejecting a constitution for 25 million people," Hamed al-Bayati, of the Shia Supreme Council of the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI) was quoted as saying.

Analysts point out that the last minute hindrances in the adoption of an interim constitution reflect deep seated anxieties that Iraq's

minority Kurds and the majority Shias are experiencing. Denied power for 400 years, Shias want a dominant role in governance that is commensurate with their majority status. But the Kurds, whose rights have also been historically denied, are uncomfortable with the rising Shia power. Keen to preserve and expand their autonomy in the Kurdish areas of northern Iraq, the Kurds want their rights to be constitutionally guaranteed. The right to a referendum was therefore meant to discourage the Shias from denying the Kurds their autonomous status in the future. Kurdish council member Mahmoud Othman was quoted as saying said Shias had objected to the referendum clause on the grounds that it enabled a minority to impose its will on the majority.

Second, the Shias want a larger representation in a future-rotating Presidency. Shia members of the governing council are apparently seeking a collective Presidency that would include three Shias, one Kurd and one Sunni Muslim. The draft in its present form caters for a single President with two deputies. The snag in the adoption of a new draft law resulted on account of the Ayatollah Sistani's intervention.

He reportedly raised both the objections to the constitution, which the Council had agreed on Monday. A spokesman for the Council said the various parties would hold consultations among themselves before meeting on Monday. The adoption of the interim constitution, which would set out the framework for how Iraq will be governed after June 30, when the U.S. occupation authorities hand over power to an unelected transitional government was already six days behind schedule. Iraq is expected to hold general elections by early 2005.

THE HINDU

57 MAR 2004

BLAST TOLL 271, SAYS PRESIDENT; US OFFICIALS DIFFER ■ 15 SUSPECTS DETAINED IN KARBALA

Iraq begins three-day mourning for Shi'ites

Associated Press

KARBALA, March 3. — Shi'ite mourners chanted slogans against the USA today, venting their anger at Iraq's instability after a series of suicide bombings against pilgrims. As the country began three days of mourning, officials said 15 people, some possibly Iranians, were detained for the attacks.

Iraq Governing Council President Md Bahr al-Ulloum told reporters that 271 people were killed and 393 were injured yesterday during the near simultaneous bombings at Baghdad's

More blasts hit Baghdad

BAGHDAD, March 3. — Five large explosions rumbled through the centre of Baghdad late today, and others sounded from the green zone where the headquarters of the US-led coalition authority is located. The blasts, which happened in quick succession just after 6 p.m., came nearly two-and-a-half hours after two explosions were heard. There were no immediate reports of casualties. Earlier today, three missiles hit a Baghdad neighbourhood, damaging a television exchange and critically injuring one resident. — AP

Kazimiya shrine and holy sites in Karbala. US officials, however, put the combined death toll at 117, and the US-led administration will be signed on Friday, the current President said today. Mr Al-Ulloum said the discrepancy immediately.

document would be signed at 4 p.m. on Friday at the end of a three-day period of mourning for Shi'ite bombing victims.

US Brig. Gen. Mark Kimmitt said 15 people were detained in Karbala after the blasts. Some of had been seen with wooden carts used to bring in loads of explosions.

Pak probe: Pakistan's government announced a judicial inquiry today into a suicide attack on Shi'ite worshippers that triggered sectarian clashes, leaving at least 43 people dead, adds a report from Quetta.



Shi'ite women pray during a mass funeral on Wednesday for those killed in a series of bomb explosions in Karbala. — AFP

Democracy in West Asia?

^{8/6}
The path is paved with problems — but there's
no getting away from negotiating it

^{3/3}
THE southern swathe of Asia is deeply engaged in the search for regime change — though not through the use of force as happened in many of these countries in recent times. For some of these countries to our west, the engagement with the democratic principle and practice is rather new. Pakistan may appear to be an exception but its military-directed democracy has gone through many experiments and upheavals. Iran has settled down to democratic processes even if circumscribed by the Council of Guardians. In the two countries where regimes changes were introduced by force of arms, the new democratic dispensation has yet to start showing results.

Continuing insecurity and instability in Afghanistan could well force the abandonment of the June deadline for elections. The issue of sovereignty and the nature of the new regime in Iraq continue to come under serious doubts even as the main actors are coming together in unexpected ways to craft compromises so essential to democratic functioning. After the initial demands for an early

transfer of sovereignty to the people's representatives by the middle of this year, there seems to be an agreement that a partial solution would be acceptable to all. The UN judgment that conditions are not ripe for an election at an early date like June this year, as demanded by the Shia leaders, has helped.

But the idea of direct elections, which the US did not support, seems to have taken root and may yet be successful if the great democratic experiment of Iraq starts to succeed. For a populace not adjusted to the harmonious balance of majority-minority relations, early elections — with the UN-led international community as the guarantor — may yet be the best solution. The crafting of an interim constitution which promises something to everyone is a useful starting point. Hopefully, all focus will now be on the elections later this year — the continuing violence and insecurity notwithstanding. Delaying direct elections beyond this year by itself may aggravate the security situation rather than create better conditions for a later-day electoral process.

মহরমে রক্তাক্ত কোয়েটাও, হত ৪৪

বাগদাদ-কারবালায় বিস্ফোরণে হত ১৭০

বাগদাদ ও কারবালা, ২ মার্চ—
মহরমের দিনে ইরাকের বাগদাদ ও
কারবালা শহরে শিয়াদের জমায়েতে
একের পর এক আত্মঘাতী বিস্ফোরণ ও
মর্টার-হানায় অন্ততপক্ষে ১৭০ জনের মৃত্যু
হয়েছে। কারবালায় নিহত ১১২, বাগদাদে
৩টি বিস্ফোরণে অন্তত ৫৮ জন। দুই শহরে
অন্তত ৪০০ জন আহত। শিয়াদের অন্যতম
প্রধান তীর্থস্থান কারবালায় সাদ্দাম জমানার
অবসানের পরে প্রথম বছর মহরম পালনে
দেশবিদেশ থেকে অন্তত ২০ লক্ষ মানুষ
জড়ো হয়েছিলেন, প্রতিবেশী শিয়াপ্রধান
ইরান থেকেও এসেছিলেন কয়েক লক্ষ
মানুষ। সেখানে শহরের প্রধান প্রবেশ
তোরণের পাশে আচমকাই পর পর প্রচণ্ড
বিস্ফোরণে মুহূর্তে গোটা এলাকা
বহুভূমিতে পরিণত হয়। রয়টার্সের
সংবাদদাতা স্তম্ভিত হয়ে দেখেন, আশ্বিন
আর ধর্ম্মার মধ্যে চারপাশে ছড়িয়ে ছিটিয়ে
পড়েছে টুকরো টুকরো অঙ্গপ্রত্যঙ্গ।
এলাকায় রক্তের স্রোত বইছে।

বিস্ফোরণ কারা ঘটিয়েছে, জানা
যায়নি। ইরাকে অন্তর্ভুক্ত সরকারের হাতে
ক্ষমতা হস্তান্তরের প্রস্তুতিপর্ব হিসাবে কাল
এখানে ইরাকের মার্কিন মদতপুষ্ট গভর্নিং
কাউন্সিল অর্ধবর্তী সংবিধানের খসড়া চূড়ান্ত
করবে। ইরাকে শিয়া সম্প্রদায় সংখ্যাগুরু,
কাউন্সিলে তাদেরই আধিপত্য। সংখ্যালঘু
হয়েও সুন্নিরা সাদ্দাম জমানায় শিয়াদের
উপর অনেক অত্যাচার চালায়। এই
অবস্থায় মহরমের দিনে শিয়া সম্প্রদায়ের
উপর এই হামলা ইরাকে শিয়া-সুন্নি
সম্প্রদায়ের মধ্যে গৃহযুদ্ধ বাধানোর
প্ররোচনা বলে অনেকেই মনে করছেন।
কিন্তু লক্ষ্যণীয়, বাগদাদ বা কারবালায়
কোথাও শিয়ারা সুন্নিদের এই বিস্ফোরণের
জন্য দায়ী করেনি। শুধু ইরাকি কাউন্সিল
জর্ডনের এক জঙ্গিকে দায়ী করছে, আর
মার্কিন সেনাবাহিনী আল কায়দাকে সন্দেহ
করছে। ওয়াশিংটন আজ তীব্র ভাষায়
আজকের হামলার নিন্দা করেছে।

কোয়েটা ও কাবুলেও মহরমের দিন
শিয়ারা আক্রান্ত হয়েছেন। দক্ষিণ-পশ্চিম
পাকিস্তানের কোয়েটা শহরে শিয়াদের
মহরমের মিছিলে আততায়ীরা গুলি

চালালে অন্তত ৪৪ জন প্রাণ হারান, আহত
হন ১৫০ জন। কাবুলে শিয়াদের মিছিলের
সঙ্গে সশস্ত্র মিলিশিয়ার সংঘর্ষে এক ব্যক্তি
নিহত এবং আরও ১৬ জন আহত হন।

সাদ্দাম হুসেনের আমলে মহরম পালন
নিষিদ্ধ ছিল ইরাকে। গত বছর ব্রিটিশ-
মার্কিন জোট বাহিনীর হাতে সাদ্দাম
সরকারের পতনের পর এ বছর প্রাণ খুলে

অভিযোগের তির আমেরিকার দিকে

বাগদাদ, ২ মার্চ— ইরাকে শিয়াদের
উপর মহরমের দিনে এতবড় আঘাতের
পরেও কিন্তু দেশের সুন্নিদের দিকে
কোনও শিয়া ধর্ম্মগুরুই অভিযোগের
আঙুল তোলেননি। ইরাকে সংখ্যাগরিষ্ঠ
(৬০ শতাংশ) অংশই শিয়া, এবং মার্কিন
মদতপুষ্ট ইরাকি গভর্নিং কাউন্সিলেও
শিয়ারাই সংখ্যাগরিষ্ঠ। সংখ্যাগরিষ্ঠ শিয়া
সম্প্রদায় সাদ্দাম জমানায় সুন্নিদের হাতে
নির্ঘাতিত হয়েছিল। আজকের হামলার
পরেও শিয়ারা সুন্নিদের দায়ী করতে রাজি
হয়নি। সি এন এনের সংবাদদাতা
জানিয়েছেন, বাগদাদ ও কারবালায়
মানুষ এটাই বিশ্বাস করতে চাইছেন যে
ইরাকিরা নন, শিয়া-সুন্নির মধ্যে গৃহযুদ্ধ
বাধাতে আমেরিকা এটা করতে পারে।

গভর্নিং কাউন্সিল প্রকাশ্যে জর্ডনের
জঙ্গি আবু মুসাব জারকোয়াইয়ের কথা
তুলেছে। কিছুদিন আগে মার্কিন সেনা
তার একটি চিঠি-সহ সিডি হস্তগত
করেছিল, সেই চিঠিতে ইরাকে গৃহযুদ্ধ
বাধানোর লক্ষ্যে হামলা চালাতে আল
কায়দার আত্মঘাতী জঙ্গিদের আর্জি
জানিয়েছিল জারকোয়াই। ইরাকিদের
মনের সন্দেহ দূর করতে মার্কিন বাহিনীর
ব্রিগেডিয়ার জেনারেল মার্ক হার্টলিং
বলেছেন, “আমি নিশ্চিত, কিছু লোক এই
গণ্ডগোল বাধাতে বন্ধপরিষ্কার ছিল।”

শিয়াদের উপর আত্মঘাতী হামলার
এর পর পাঁচের পাতায়

মহরম পালন করতে রাস্তায় নেমেছিলেন
শিয়ারা। কারবালা প্রান্তরে হজরত
মহম্মদের নাতি ইমাম হুসেন প্রাণ
দিয়েছিলেন, কারবালাতেই রয়েছে
হুসেনের পিতা আলির নামাঙ্কিত মসজিদ।
শিয়াদের পবিত্র শহর কারবালায় মহরম
উপলক্ষে দেশবিদেশ থেকে ২০ লক্ষেরও
বেশি মানুষ জড়ো হয়েছিলেন। ইরান
থেকেও আসেন পুণ্যার্থীরা। প্রত্যক্ষদর্শী
হাসান হাদি বলেন, “সকাল ১০টা নাগাদ
(স্থানীয় সময়) ইরানি পুণ্যার্থীরা রাস্তায়
বুকে, পিঠে, মাথায় ছোরা ও তরবারির
আঘাতে নিজেদের রক্তাক্ত করে মহরমের
শোক প্রকাশ করছিলেন। তখনই প্রচণ্ড
বিস্ফোরণ। মুহূর্তে গোটা এলাকা রক্তাক্ত
হয়ে উঠল।” প্রত্যক্ষদর্শীদের মতে, ঠেলা
গাড়ি ও জঞ্জালের ভিতর বিস্ফোরক লুকনো
ছিল। বিস্ফোরণে ছিন্নভিন্ন হয়ে যায়
মিছিলের মানুষদের দেহ। আহতদের
আর্তনাদ, আতঙ্কে চিৎকার, সঙ্গে
কান্নাকাটি। নিহতদের ৪০-৫০ জন ইরানি।

অ্যাভুলেপ বা স্ট্রেকারের জন্য অপেক্ষা
করার সময় ছিল না। আহতদের কাউকে
জোগাড় করা চাদরে বুলিয়ে, কাউকে
পাঁজাকোলা করে হাসপাতালে নিয়ে যাওয়া
হয়। পরিহ্রিত সামাল দিতে তড়িঘড়ি
খোলা আকাশের নীচেই অস্থায়ী হাসপাতাল
তৈরি করে ফেলেন চিকিৎসা-কর্মীরা।
বাগদাদে বিস্ফোরণ হয় শহরের উত্তরে
শিয়া সম্প্রদায়ের মসজিদ খাদিমিয়াতে।
বিস্ফোরণের পরের ছবিটা ছিল কারবালার
মতোই। দুই শহরেই আহতদের বাঁচাতে
জরুরি ভিত্তিতে রক্ত দানের আবেদন
জনানো হয়েছে।

শিয়া-সুন্নি সম্প্রীতি বজায় রাখার
আবেদন জানিয়ে গভর্নিং কাউন্সিল বলেছে,
হিংসা ছড়িয়ে ইরাকের এক ধ্বংসের চেষ্টা
সফল হবে না। এই হামলায় পুনর্গঠনের
কাজ ব্যাহত হবে না বলে কাউন্সিল দাবি
করেছে। নিহতদের প্রতি শ্রদ্ধা জানাতে
ইরাকে তিন দিন রাষ্ট্রীয় শোক পালিত
হবে। অন্য দিকে আজ সকালে বাগদাদে
একটি মার্কিন সামরিক গাড়ির উপরে
জঙ্গিরা হামলা চালায়। তাদের বোমায়
এর পর ছয়ের পাতায়

✓ IRAQ / ACCORD REACHED ON CONSTITUTION

Islam recognised as one source of law

10-14
2/3
By Atul Aneja

MANAMA, MARCH 1. After days of deliberations, Iraq's American-appointed leaders have agreed on a temporary Constitution for the country.

The draft charter will recognise Islam as one source of legislation, but not the only one. It will also give autonomy to the Kurdish minority for now, but an elected Assembly will take a final position on its status later. The U.S. administrator, Paul Bremer, is expected to sign the interim Constitution that will serve as the blueprint for Iraq's transitional Government that is expected to take charge in June.

Members of the U.S.-appointed Governing Council for Iraq were quoted as saying that the temporary Constitution might end up offering general guidelines, but the details on the big and controversial question would be left for the writers of a permanent charter.

Iraq's permanent Constitution will be drafted by an elected Assembly, which should suit the majority Shia community. Entifadh Qanbar, a spokesman for the Governing Council said all members agreed that Iraq

would not be an Islamic state. He pointed out that the draft accepted the concept of a federal state. The draft agreement, he added, had also reserved 25 per cent of the seats in the interim legislature for women.

The interim statute also sanctions the appointment of a President, two deputies, a Prime Minister and a Cabinet. Besides, there will be a bill of rights, with protections for free speech and religious freedom.

AP, Reuters report:

A Coalition Authority official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the document will be signed by Mr. Bremer on Wednesday, after the Shia Muslim holiday of Ashoura ends. "The draft strikes a balance between the role of Islam and the bill of individual rights and democratic principles".

The deal came two days after a deadline for finishing the document — a key part of the U.S. plan for handing over power to the Iraqis on June 30.

Saturday's deadline had been set by the Americans and agreed to by the Governing Council in November. When it passed with the Council still deeply divided, Mr. Bremer

helped organise marathon talks. During the discussions on Friday, several Shia members walked out, angered by the cancellation of a previous ruling that would have made divorce and inheritance subject to the rulings of religious law.

Other sticking points had included defining the role of women in a future government, with some Council members pushing for the Constitution to set out a specific quota for the number of female parliamentarians.

Blast in Baghdad

BAGHDAD, MARCH 1. A large explosion was heard on Monday in central Baghdad and appeared to have come from the vicinity of the headquarters of the U.S. occupation authority.

Shortly after the blast, a Black Hawk helicopter circled over the green zone, the U.S. compound that includes Saddam Hussein's former Republican Palace and serves as headquarters of the U.S.-led coalition.

The U.S. command had no information about it. — AP

2 MAR 2004

THE HINDU

Iraq Council agrees on interim statute

Reuters

Baghdad, March 1

IRAQ'S US-APPOINTED Governing Council put aside its differences on Monday and agreed an interim constitution, a pillar of Washington's plan to hand sovereignty back by June 30.

"This morning the Governing Council unanimously approved the Transitional Administrative Law after weeks of intensive talks," the Council said in a statement. The document will be signed Wednesday.

The 25-member Council had missed a February 28 deadline to strike a deal because of divisions over the role of Islam, quotas for women in government and Kurdish demands for autonomy.

Officials and participants in the talks said the law recognised Islam as Iraq's official religion and said it would be a source of legislation but not the primary source, as had been demanded by many in Iraq's 60 per cent Shia majority.

A senior coalition official said the compromise "strikes the right balance" between the Islamic identity of most Iraqis and the need to enshrine freedom of religion and freedom of speech, which are protected by a bill of rights in the document. "The language on Islam and the state effectively says that this won't compromise individual rights or democratic principles," the official said.

The document says elections should be held by late 2004 or early 2005. Washington's initial plan was for elections by the end of 2005



REUTERS
An Iraqi woman walks past a US Army Humvee near Baghdad on Monday.

but Iraq's most revered Shia cleric, Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, demanded polls be held sooner.

Sistani initially said the provisional sovereign government due to take power on June 30 should be directly elected, but after a UN team ruled this was not feasible, he softened his stance and said elections must be held by end-2004.

With US presidential elections nearing, President Bush's administration says it is determined to stick to plans to hand sovereignty back to Iraqis on June 30. But the mechanism for selecting the provisional government has yet to be agreed.

Hamid al-Bayati of the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution, one of the main Shia political groups, said the document ensured "there can't be any law passed that is not in keeping with Islam," and that it met Sistani's demands.

"This is what Ayatollah Sistani wanted to see in the

interim constitution, so yes, what has been agreed is okay, although not everyone is fully and completely with what was in there," he said. "This is a process in which people had to back off some of the things they wanted."

Another controversial issue had been whether there should be guarantees about the representation of women. The senior coalition official said the document ensured 25 per cent of seats for women in a forthcoming legislative Assembly.

The interim constitution's backing for a federal state also recognises the northern zone Kurds have run since wresting it from Baghdad after the 1991 Gulf War, one element of a bid for autonomy that some Arabs fear will split Iraq.

Rowsch Shways, who represented Kurdish Council member Massoud Barzani in the talks, said the language on federalism met Kurds' demands that their *peshmerga* militias remain as a Kurdistan national guard rather than as part of a national army.

The document leaves until a permanent constitution the status of areas which Kurds argue belong to them and were gerrymandered into neighbouring provinces by Saddam Hussein's government under a form of ethnic cleansing.

During discussions, several Shia members of the Council walked out, angered when women invited to the session applauded the cancellation of a previous ruling that would have made divorce and inheritance subject to religious law.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

2 MAR 2004

HD-12 19/12 vs. Azue-0
IRAQI CONSTITUTION / DISPUTE OVER ISLAMIC LAW, WOMEN'S RIGHTS

Setback to talks as Shias walk out

BAGHDAD, FEB. 28. Iraqi leaders trying to make a Saturday deadline for writing an interim Constitution hit a roadblock after several Shia members walked out of the last-minute talks in a dispute over the role of Islamic law and women's rights, a Governing Council member said.

Mahmoud Othman, a Sunni Kurd on the 25-member Council, said a decision not to make Islamic law the basis for issues like divorce and inheritance issues prompted eight of the Council's 13 Shia members to walk out.

Missing the Saturday deadline by a few days will not set back the U.S. plans to transfer power on June 30.

But the walkout illustrated the deep divisions on the body running generally along the country's ethnic lines.

Iraq's Shia majority is eager to hold power under a new Government, worrying the Sunni minority.

The talks stalled on Resolution 137, which was passed by the Council in December abolishing the previous, liberal Personal Status Law — that governs family law — and allowed each sect in Iraq to apply its own religious law.

Abdul-Aziz al-Hakim, a hard-line Shia Muslim who headed the Council in December, pushed the decision through, apparently taking advantage of

the absence of several Council members. "It was me who recommended that we discuss the issue of Resolution 137," said the Council member, Raja Habib al-Khuzaa'i, a Shia.

Despite the walkout, she said talks were expected to resume and the interim Constitution drawn up.

The resolution sparked widespread protests by women, who feared it would roll back the rights they have.

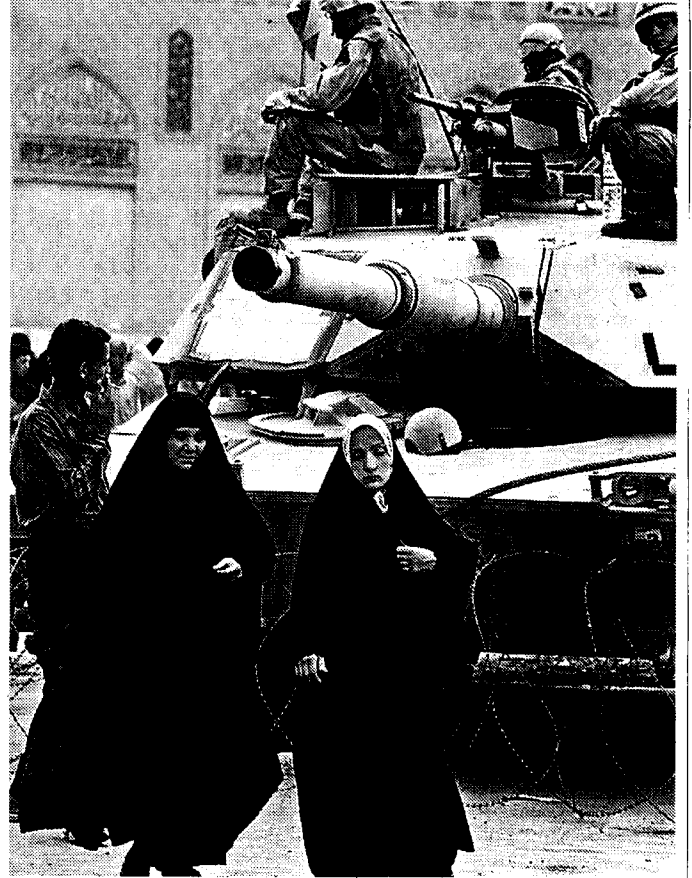
The interim Constitution is supposed to serve as the foundation of the Iraqi Government until a permanent charter can be completed next year.

It will serve as the basis of the legal system after the U.S.-led coalition returns sovereignty to the Iraqis on June 30.

Besides the role of Islam, the major differences over the Constitution are the extent of Kurdish autonomy and the structure of a collective presidency — whether the body should have three or five members and whether the chairmanship should rotate.

Conservatives on the Council want the Constitution to state that Islam is the main source of legislation and no law should be passed if it is contrary to Islamic values, Mr. Othman said.

The U.S.-favoured text would enshrine Islam as one of the sources of law — but not the only one. — AP



Two Iraqi women pass by U.S. tank in Baghdad recently. Dozens of women's groups have sprung up in the country since the war ended last April, but few appear to know how to seize the opportunity and make a clear set of demands as politicians draw up an interim Constitution. — AP

Iran elections

End of the road for President Khatami?

With the banning of 2,400 mostly reformist candidates from elections in Iran the conservative victory was a foregone conclusion. What was not was the decent electoral turnout, about 50 per cent, lower than in earlier elections but higher than what the reformists might have hoped. Cynical explanations have been proffered for this, as citizens could be harassed by the bureaucracy if they could not present evidence that they had voted. But frustration with reformist candidates may also have been a factor, as they have held the parliament for four years and the presidency for seven, without delivering effective change. Uncle Sam's depredations in Iraq next door may also have led voters to hardline candidates. President Mohammed Khatami cuts a sorry figure now. Despite describing the elections as unfair, and despite most of his followers as well as his brother who was Deputy Speaker in the outgoing parliament being thrown out by the Guardian Council appointed vetting committee, he decided to carry on regardless. He was too mild-mannered to provide effective and inspirational leadership to the reformist camp, and now faces the prospect of being a lame duck in a hostile parliament for the year or so that is left of his presidency.

But the conservatives will find it difficult to turn the clock back on reforms. The Islamic revolution has receded from the memory of Iran's overwhelmingly young populace while, as in India, the consumer revolution has reached its shores and whetted expectations. Within the conservative camp pragmatists are coming to the fore who, like Deng Xiaoping's reformers in China, would like to see greater trade with the outside world while clamping down on individual freedoms. They are aware that people coming of age with Iran's baby boom are going to need jobs soon, and those jobs will be nowhere in sight if the economy continues in its present stagnant state. Some of the slogans they campaigned under — such as "Coalition of Developers of Islamic Iran" — are reminiscent of the "development" plank on which the BJP is contesting elections.

However, Chinese-style reforms are not going to be easy. The EU, which had engaged Teheran for a while with talk about a comprehensive trade pact, has condemned the "flawed" elections just held. The US has not taken kindly to the latest revelations about Iran continuing to manufacture components for centrifuges, and will most likely block Iran's accession to the WTO. Unless Teheran can deliver the equivalent of a Nixon-Mao rapprochement — and the idea of a Bush-Khamenei rapprochement joggles the mind at this point of time — it will find that the price of gaining access to Western capital, technology and markets is linked to two others less palatable from its point of view: refraining from developing a nuclear arsenal and granting greater freedom to its people.

THE STATESMAN 26 FEB 2004

W. Arin
Man

A CONSERVATIVE COUP

HDP 10
26/2

THE PROCESS OF reform that was initiated by Iran's President Syed Mohammed Khatami after he assumed office in 1997 appears to have come to an end with his conservative opponents securing a majority in parliament. Mr. Khatami was not able to advance his agenda even when his supporters had an absolute majority from 2000 until the parliamentary poll held last Friday. Unelected bodies dominated by the conservatives, such as the judiciary and the Council of Guardians, had obstructed the efforts of the legislative and administrative wings to liberalise the political culture. With the conservatives wresting control of the national legislature, Mr. Khatami can do little more than serve out the last year of his term. The Iranian President bears much of the blame for creating this sorry situation since his failure to confront his opponents only encouraged them to wage a counter-campaign. He ought to have stood by his supporters when the Council barred almost 2000 pro-reform candidates, including 80 members of the outgoing parliament, from contesting the elections. While liberal parties demonstrated in protest and Ministers and Provincial Governors threatened to resign, Mr. Khatami petitioned for a review of the disqualification orders. He ended his mild show of dissent once the Supreme Religious Leader, Ayatollah Syed Ali Khamenei, insisted that elections should be held on schedule.

Mr. Khatami and those who hold office under him do not have many honourable options. They might be tempted to quit their posts and launch a mass movement to protest against the pre-ordained election result. However, the prospects for an extra-parliamentary form of struggle do not look bright against the background of the Iranian masses not heeding the liberals' call for a boycott of the polls. The Interior Ministry,

which is controlled by reformers, has confirmed that almost 50 per cent of eligible voters cast their ballots. While voter participation in this election was significantly lower than in the polls that were held when the reform movement was at its peak, the figures do not suggest there was a mass boycott. It is possible that many Iranians have become disenchanted with liberal politicians who have consistently failed to live up to their promises. The most vigorous constituents of the reform movement, organisations representing students and women, no longer see any merit in the excuses given by the pro-reform parties for non-performance. A new generation that has come of age during confrontations spread over the last seven years is likely to pick up the banner of the struggle to change the system.

While the result of the parliamentary poll might suggest that the conservatives will be able to elect one of their own as President in 2005, this is by no means a foregone conclusion. The conservatives are not a monolithic bloc and there does not seem to be any obvious candidate behind whom they can rally. A squabble over the candidacy might become just one of the reasons for infighting within this camp. While a section of the conservative bloc consists of die-hard reactionaries, others do appreciate the need for change especially in the economic sphere. An international context, in which Iran is under pressure to disclose and dismantle its nuclear weapons programme and to undertake socio-political reform, will also have its impact. For all the rhetoric from the conservatives, there are some among them who are not averse to a reconciliation with the "Great Satan." Ayatollah Khamenei, who has emerged as the real winner of the struggle between conservatives and liberals, will now have to work hard to control his cohorts.

THE HINDU

26 FEB 2004

Blast kills 7 Iraqi cops

Agence France Presse

KIRKUK, Feb. 23. — Seven policemen were killed today in a suicide car attack which also left two bombers dead in northern Iraq, as US Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld held talks in Baghdad on shifting security responsibility to Iraqis.

The fresh attack against Iraqi police, in Kirkuk, also came as the UN prepared to issue recommendations on the best way forward for Iraq.

As insurgents try to derail the political process, at least 250 Iraqis have been killed so far in February, making it the bloodiest month in Iraq since the fall of Saddam Hussein last April, the interior ministry said today.

Police Sergeant Md Mortada said two people drove up to the station in a white Oldsmobile and blew up the vehicle, packed with nails and 50

kilograms of TNT.

Dr Hashem Mohammed of the city's Azadi hospital put the number of policemen killed at seven, along with the two bombers who were completely incinerated by the blast.

Another 45 people were wounded, all but 10 of them policemen, said the city's police chief, Mr Turhan Yussef.

'No Nato role'

France's President says he does not see a role for the Nato in Iraq and that power must be returned to Iraqis by July as planned, AP adds from Paris.

While France would examine any requests for the to offer support to countries that send their own troops to Iraq, it does not see a role for NATO as a whole, Mr Jacques Chirac said. "We still do not see the conditions in which a NATO engagement would be," he added.

Reformists

take out

rage on

Iran House

① H. 200
G. 9
2/12

Tehran, Feb. 23 (Reuters): De-
feated at polls they said were
rigged, Iran's reformers vented
their frustration in a rowdy par-
liament today by lashing out at
hardliners who have blocked
them for four years and will soon
take their seats.

Outgoing deputies have to
step down at the end of May.
Then moderate President Mo-
hammad Khatami and his cabi-
net will be the only reformers
still in office, facing a hostile par-
liament and retaining little of re-
forms once hailed as the
"Tehran Spring". "I am an-
nouncing my protest at the ille-
gal process of un-elected institu-
tions in recent years which
reached its peak in the February
20 election," outgoing woman
MP Fatemeh Haqiqatjou told
parliament.

Conservatives won an easy
victory in Friday's parliamen-
tary polls after the 12-man hard-
line Guardian Council barred
some 2,500 reformers from
standing. Hardliners won all five
seats in the former capital Isfa-
han, once a reformist strong-
hold. Turnout was the lowest for
a parliamentary election since
the 1979 Islamic revolution, but
still higher than expected at
around 50 per cent. Fewer than
expected joined a boycott by the
leading reformist party.

Many were frustrated with
Khatami's inability to bring
change, put the economy in
order or stand up to the hardlin-
ers. The outgoing reformist par-
liament, with less chance than
ever of getting laws past the
Guardian Council, began debat-
ing one by one the resignations
of some 100 deputies disquali-
fied from the polls. Conserva-
tives ridiculed the debate. "Their
aim is not really resigning, this
is just propaganda," Gholamali
Haddadadel, who came top of
Friday's poll in Tehran, said.

Angry voters attacked state
offices in the southern city of
Kohkilouye and damaged vehi-
cles, the official Irna news
agency said. Eight people were
killed and 30 injured in two other
southern towns in similar
protests over the weekend.

THE TELEGRAPH 24 FEB 2004

IRAN / U.S. IS THE LOSER: KHAMENEI

Conservatives heading for decisive win

By Atul Aneja

MANAMA, FEB. 22. Iran's conservative politicians were well on course of wresting control over the 290-member Parliament as results of the controversial parliamentary elections held on Friday began to come in.

With two-thirds of the votes counted, the conservative bloc considered loyal to the ruling clerics has already won 135 seats in the Majlis (Parliament), while the tally of reformists and 'independents' hovered around the 65 mark.

Already the conservatives are nearing the 146-seat figure that would give them a majority in the Assembly.

In Teheran, the shift was particularly perceptive as early indications show that none of the reformist contenders was likely to win even a single one of the 30 seats.

The final tally is expected in the next few days.

As the counting progressed, there is still no consensus on what percentage of the 46-million strong electorate voted. The Interior Ministry, dominated by officials appointed by reformists, has pitched the polling between 40 to 45 per cent.

But the state media claimed

that the turnout was at least 60 per cent. The Supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, was upbeat about the voter turnout and told the state media that, "The loser of this election is the United States, Zionism and enemies of the Iranian nation," he said on Saturday.

"The judgment of American imperialists who have been talking non-sense about these elections is absolutely worthless."

Analysts point out that despite the controversy, the turnout has been much larger than expected.

An official estimate published prior to elections projected that only 30 per cent of the voters would exercise their franchise. Besides, polling in the reformist strongholds, such as Teheran was not expected to go beyond the 10 per cent mark.

Polling in Teheran has been estimated at around 28 per cent.

Responding to the mass disqualifications of its candidates for the election by the hardline supervisory body, the Council of Guardians, the main reformist party had issued the call for a poll boycott.

Meanwhile, there have been some reports about election related violence in parts of Iran.

THE HINDU 23 FEB 2004

Iraq could be 15 months away from polls

Reuters
Baghdad, February 21

THE US administrator in Iraq has said it will not be possible to hold elections for a year to 15 months, putting him at odds with the country's most powerful religious leader who has insisted delay must be brief.

Paul Bremer, speaking in an interview with Dubai-based *Al Arabiya* TV, said Iraq needed time to prepare for a vote. "These technical problems will take time to fix — we estimate somewhere between a year to 15 months... There are real important technical problems why elections are not possible," Bremer said in excerpts of the interview broadcast on Saturday.

But Dan Senor, a top coalition spokesman, said Bremer's comments were reported inaccurately. "It is not Bremer's view that it will take 15 months. That is one date-range estimate we have had, but that is one end of a range," Senor said. "The UN estimates somewhere between a year to 15 months, and it might be that, but it could be sped up."

UN Secretary General Kofi Annan had on Thursday ruled out holding direct elections before a planned June 30 transfer of power.

"Iraq has no election law, it has no national commission to even establish a na-

Handover blues

THE BUSH Administration acknowledged on Friday that its ambitious plan to transfer sovereignty directly to a democratically-elected government was unlikely to succeed, after Iraqis insisted on polls untainted by US influence.

White House spokesman Scott McClellan said the initial plan for an interim, elected government through a complicated series of 18 regional caucuses had failed to pass muster with Iraqi leaders.

Reuters, Washington

tional law governing political parties, it has no voters' list, it has not had a credible, reliable census for almost 20 years. There are no constituent boundaries to decide where elections would take place," Bremer reportedly said.

The interview will be aired in a programme on Monday, the channel said in a news bulletin.

Iraq's top Shia leader Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, seen as holding the key to Iraq's political future, said in an interview on Friday that any delay should be brief.

Asked how long, he told

Germay's *Der Spiegel*: "It should not last long."
Sistani had demanded direct elections before June 30 but recently agreed with a UN envoy that polls required more preparations.

Iraq's majority Shias had protested by the tens of thousands in support of the reclusive Sistani's call for early polls this year, and could take to the streets again if he expresses displeasure with Bremer's decisions.

After decades of oppression under Saddam's Sunni regime, Shias pin their hopes on elections to assert their numerical superiority. The Americans hope for a smooth handover of power but the country is gripped by a relentless insurgency in which suicide bombers attack US troops and their allies in police and security forces at will.

Four US soldiers were wounded and their Iraqi translator was killed on Saturday when gunmen ambushed their convoy south of Baghdad, the US Army said. A firefight also broke out Saturday in Ramadi as insurgent forces fired on US troops. Explosives went off in a car in Baghdad but no casualties were reported.

The US wants Nato to take command of a force controlling a swathe of southern Iraq, currently lead by Poland, to take off some heat from its forces.



AFP
DOLLAR DELUGE IN DINAR LAND: An Iraqi boy shows chocolate bars wrapped in copies of dollar and euro bills at a shop in Samawa on Saturday.

Red Cross team visits Saddam in custody

Associated Press
Bangkok, February 21

RED CROSS representatives visited Saddam Hussein in US custody for the first time on Saturday amid reports quoting Iraq's US administrator that experts believed it could take up to 15 months to organise an election that Shias want quickly.

The two Red Cross delegates, one of them a doctor, met the ousted Iraqi leader at an undisclosed detention facility inside Iraq, International Committee of the Red Cross spokeswoman Nada Doumani said from Amman.

She said Saddam was allowed to write a note to his family and that the Red Cross would visit him again. She gave no details on his appearance or condition.

The ICRC is mandated to visit detainees under the Geneva Conventions on the conduct of warfare but will not speak publicly on what conditions it finds. The delegates will, however, share their findings with the US-led forces holding Saddam.

"The aim of this visit is to track and monitor the conditions of detention and treatment of the detainee," Doumani said. "We want to see whether he is getting enough food and water and also to check the state of his health and to give him the opportunity of writing a message to his family, which he did."

Iran hawks on course for victory

Tehran, Feb. 21 (Reuters): Islamic conservatives hostile to President Mohammad Khatami's liberal reforms swept towards a predictable victory over shackled reformists today after a disputed parliamentary election with a sharply reduced turnout.

Interior ministry figures showed conservatives won 133 of the first 194 provincial seats declared, deputy parliament speaker Behzad Nabavi said. A total of 289 seats were at stake.

Reformists won 37, independents 17 and five were reserved for Iran's religious minorities — Christians, Jews and Zoroastrians. In 31 districts where no candidate polled more than 25 per cent, there will be a run-off later.

There was not one woman among the first 194 lawmakers elected. There were 13 in the outgoing parliament.

Reformists branded the election rigged and many boycotted it after the unelected hardline Guardian Council banned 2,500 mainly reformist candidates, including 80 sitting lawmakers.

"Unfortunately, this was not

a free election," said Mostafa Tajzadeh, a leader of the main reformist party the Islamic Iran Participation Front, which boycotted the poll. "Our belief from the outset that the conservatives would win was proved right."

A conservative majority could spell an end to Khatami's seven-year experiment in allowing greater freedom of speech and loosening Islamic cultural and social restrictions, a drive

that hardliners have tried to obstruct at every turn.

State radio and television keen to assert the reformist boycott had had no impact, announced a 60 per cent turnout.

But Vice-President Mohammad Ali Abtahi said the national turnout was about 50 per cent and in Tehran just 29 per cent, sharply down on the 67 per cent who voted nationwide in 2000, when Khatami's reformist allies

won two thirds of the seats.

Reformist lawmaker Ali Shakurirad, banned from standing again, told a news conference the fact that half the nation had not voted and more than 70 per cent had stayed home in Tehran was a big defeat for the hardline clerics. But apathy and disillusionment at the slow pace of Khatami's reforms may have had as much impact as boycott calls.

The lowest turnout for a parliamentary election since the 1979 Islamic Revolution was 53 per cent in 1980.

With a quarter of the votes in the 30-seat Tehran electoral district counted, conservatives of the Alliance for the Advancement of Islamic Iran held the top 20 places, the Iran Students News Agency said.

Conservative commentator Amir Mohebian, a policy adviser to Iran's senior clerical leaders, suggested the victors would use a velvet glove rather than an iron fist, and the new assembly would usher in a second phase of more effective reforms.



An Iranian interior ministry official speaks on the phone at the election headquarters in Tehran. (Reuters)

US says elections unfair

Washington, Feb. 21 (Reuters): Risking a nationalist backlash, the US criticised Iran's parliamentary elections today as unfair because hardliners had banned many reformist candidates.

"Candidates have been barred from participating in the elections in an attempt to limit the choice of the Iranian people for their government. These actions do not represent free and fair elections and are not consistent with international norms," state department spokesman Adam Ereli said. Previously when Washington has commented on elections in the Islamic republic, Iranians have perceived it as US meddling and it has hurt the reformists' popularity.

Hardline clerical leaders played on such sentiment yesterday, telling voters Washington had encouraged a boycott in an election that reformist President Mohammad Khatami has also called "unfair."

Red Cross team visits Saddam

BAGHDAD, FEB. 21. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) visited the former Iraqi President, Saddam Hussein, in U.S. custody today, an ICRC spokeswoman said.

"Two ICRC representatives, including a doctor, visited Saddam Hussein today in Iraq and were able to stay with him long enough for a physical and mental evaluation," Nada Dumani said from the Jordanian capital Amman. "In accordance with its rules, the ICRC is unable to give any indication about the condition of Saddam Hussein. The ICRC, following this visit, as in the case of all (Iraqi) prisoners, will report directly to the (U.S.-led) coalition," she said.

— AFP

THE HINDU

22 FEB 2004

Conservatives establish lead

By Atul Aneja

MANAMA, FEB. 21. Contrary to expectations, nearly half of Iran's electorate cast its ballot in Friday's parliamentary poll, where the turnout for the elections had become a major political issue between conservatives and reformists.

According to senior Government officials, between 20 and 22 million of the 46 million eligible voters turned up for elections. That would mean that between 43 and 46 per cent of the electorate cast its vote. The Guardians Council, a conservative supervisory body that validates the results has contested this figure, by pointing out that the total size of the Iranian electorate stood at 43 million. Going by its calculations, the polling touched the 50 per cent mark, a psychologically important benchmark.

In Teheran, a stronghold of the reformists, where the only 10 per cent of the voters were expected to show up, the turnout stood at around 30 per cent. Despite the respectable showing, the polling for the seventh Majlis (Parliament) was the lowest since the Islamic Revolution, which took place 25 years ago. The lowest polling so far was in the 1980 elections when 53 per cent of the electorate exercised its franchise.

dad-Adel, has recently stressed that revamping the economy was the country's top priority. He also pointed out that the Coalition of Builders rejected "violence and force" to enforce Islamic regulations.

Analysts see the moderate, but higher-than-expected turnout, as a setback for the reformists who had asked the people to boycott the poll.

A lower turnout, it had hoped, would have questioned the legitimacy of the new Parliament. The hard-liners had also staked their prestige on voting percentages and Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, had more than once exhorted the people to vote in large numbers.

The stand-off between the conservatives and reformists had come to a head last month, when the Council of Guardians disqualified thousands of candidates.

Both the United States and the European Union have been critical of the mass exclusion of reformist candidates.

But the former conservative President, Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, has countered this criticism by pointing out that Iran had a better turnout than the United States, where a President winning only 25 per cent of the vote had entered the White House.



Iranian pilots sitting beneath a map of the country at the Interior Ministry's election headquarters in Teheran on Saturday, direct helicopters picking up ballot boxes from remote areas. — Reuters

Results from Friday's poll have stated trickling in and show the conservatives establishing a comfortable lead.

According to figures released by the Interior Ministry, conservatives had won 43 of the first 83 constituencies declared.

Reformists had won 21 seats, and the rest went to independents, whose sympathies were not yet known.

In 17 constituencies no candidate polled more than 25 per

Iran hawks slap US to bring out voters

Tehran, Feb. 20 (Reuters): Iranians appeared to have largely ignored boycott calls in a disputed parliamentary election today and were poised to elect hardliners opposed to reformist President Mohammad Khatami.

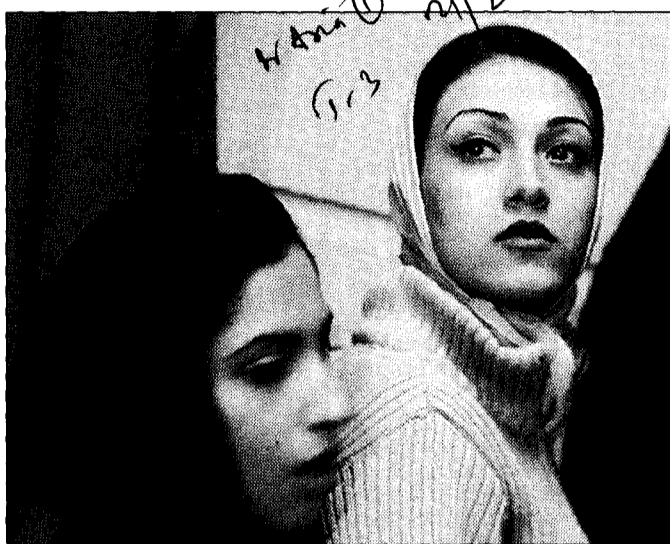
With polling extended by four hours beyond the official closing time to allow latecomers to vote, an interior ministry source said first estimates suggested a reduced but respectable national turnout of between 47 and 52 per cent. That compares with 67 per cent in 2000 when reformers linked to Khatami swept two-thirds of the parliament seats. Most prominent reformists were banned from running this time by a watchdog panel of unelected hardline clerics.

Iran's clerical leaders and state media had exhorted voters to "slap America in the face" by turning out in droves, seeking to tap a deep vein of nationalism and suspicion of foreign interference among many Iranians.

The main reformist party, led by Khatami's brother Mohammad Reza, and the main pro-reform student movement boycotted the poll.

In Tehran, where their support is strongest, the ministry source said turnout was down to 20-25 per cent.

But the reformers' predictions of a nationwide turnout of 40 per cent or less appeared to have been dashed. Conservatives



Women wait to cast their vote at a polling station in Tehran. (AFP)

had forecast up to 60 per cent but were quick to note that around 50 per cent would be comparable to US presidential elections. With most reformists barred and a conservative victory virtually assured, Iran's clerical rulers sought a high turnout to endorse the legitimacy of the Islamic system.

Official participation figures and first results were not expected until early tomorrow.

Reuters correspondents around Tehran said many voters were choosing the main conservative Alliance for the Advancement of Islamic Iran, which op-

posed Khatami's policy of allowing greater political, media and cultural freedom. The interior ministry extended voting in Iran's 28 provinces by four hours to 1830 GMT to accommodate late voters. Supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, among the first to cast his ballot, said the Islamic Republic's enemies were trying to deter young people from voting.

"You see how those who are against the Iranian nation and the Islamic revolution are trying so hard to prevent people from going to the polls," Khamenei told state television.

Qom (Iran), Feb. 20 (Reuters): Faizolah Hazrati may not know anything about the three candidates he voted for in Iran's parliamentary election today, but he knows exactly why he voted for them.

"I voted for Islam," the wrinkled and stooped former farmer, who gave his age as "about 100-years-old", said at a busy polling station in Qom, the nerve centre of Iran's Islamic theocracy about 125 km south of Tehran.

Like many in the desert city where thousands of religious students study under the tutelage of leading Shia clerics, Hazrati turned to the theologi-

The spell of the schools

cal schools for advice on who to vote for today. "We vote for the ones that the theological school recommends," explained his son, Abbas, a local government employee.

"There are a lot of candidates so we just follow what they (the theological schools) say," he said, as a steady stream of young and elderly men and women wearing the traditional

head-to-toe black chador filed in to cast their ballots.

In Qom, about 30 would-be legislators were barred by the hardline Guardian Council, including a reformist member of the outgoing parliament who won the biggest number of votes cast in the 2000 election.

"Some believe that when they cannot participate there's no freedom, but that's not true," said Hossein Bakhtiari, who wore a brown clerical robe.

"Look at Qom, for three seats we have more than 80 candidates so how can they say that this election is not fair?"

HARDLINERS STRIKE ON EVE OF POLLS

Tehran contests nuclear reports

Vienna/Tehran, Feb. 19 (Reuters): Iran, accused by the US of trying to build an atomic bomb, today dismissed new allegations that it was carrying out sensitive, undeclared nuclear activities at a military base.

Diplomats at the UN nuclear watchdog in Vienna said United Nations inspectors had found components that could be used in advanced centrifuges for extracting enriched uranium, which can be used as nuclear fuel or to make an atomic bomb.

"Iran's nuclear activities are entirely peaceful and Iran has not had and nor does it have military nuclear activities," foreign ministry spokesman Hamid Reza Asefi said in a statement faxed to Reuters.

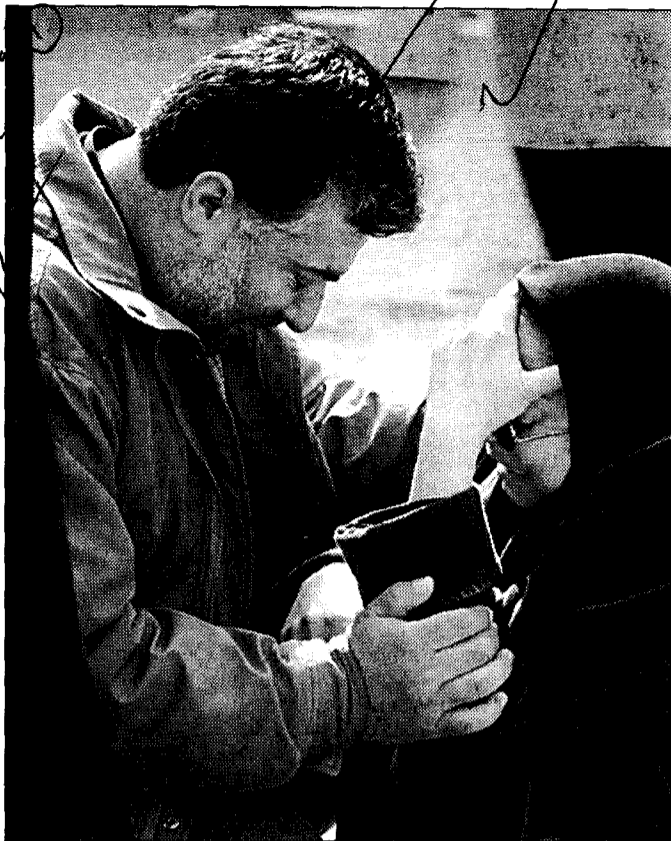
At issue is whether Iran made omissions in what it says was a full declaration of its nuclear technology to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in Vienna in October. "This stuff should have been declared," a diplomat said. The daily *USA Today* reported that the parts had been found at a military base called Doshan Tapeh. Diplomats said the parts were compatible with the "P2" uranium-enrichment centrifuge, a Pakistani version of the advanced western "G2" design.

But Asefi said: "In none of Iran's military centres is a nuclear programme being pursued and P2 centrifuges do not exist in such centres." There was no comment from the IAEA.

The exchanges were the latest in a long series of allegations and denials surrounding Iran's nuclear programme, which it insists is purely for generating electricity.

US undersecretary of state John Bolton said only last week there was no doubt that Tehran was pursuing nuclear weapons, and accused it of systematic deception.

But US officials have also made clear that Washington is in no rush to refer the matter to the UN Security Council, which has the authority to impose sanctions. It has left much of the running to the EU trio of Britain, France and Germany, which last November persuaded Iran to suspend uranium enrichment and accept more intrusive international inspections.



A couple mourn for their dead brother in Nishapur, Iran, who was killed after a fuel-laden, runaway train exploded on Wednesday. Grieving mothers on Thursday sifted through charred bodies in Nishapur for their loved ones as the toll from the blast rose to 320. (Reuters)

Crackdown on reformists

Tehran, Feb. 19 (Reuters): A hardline crackdown on Iran's reform movement widened today on the eve of a disputed parliamentary election when prosecutors sealed a campaign office of the main reformist party and blocked its news website.

It followed the closure of the two most outspoken reformist newspapers yesterday for daring to report an unprecedented scathing open letter to supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei by dozens of reformist lawmakers banned from tomorrow's poll.

"They are blocking our channels of communication with the people," Ali Shakourirad, one of the deputies and a leading member of the Islamic Iran Participation Front, said. The party is boycotting the election, which it says was rigged when an unelected clerical watchdog disqualified more than 2,500 mainly reformist candidates. Another 1,179 contenders have since withdrawn from the race.

Criticising the absolute Islamic leader is an offence, and the Supreme National Security Council had ordered newspapers not to report the six-page letter in which deputies accused Khamenei of presiding over a system that trampled on people's rights. The *Yas-e No* and *Sharq* dailies, and the *Rouydad* website were shut down when they disobeyed. Without directly mentioning the latest crackdown, pro-reform President Mohammad Khatami warned of the risk of despotism. In a speech to intellectuals and scientists today, carried by the official Irna news agency, Khatami said freedom meant people had the right to choose. "Despotism and imposition of ideas will bring no result except corruption, but freedom and an open atmosphere, while it may do some harm, will cultivate virtue," he said.

Issa Saharkhiz, a reformist journalist and former deputy culture minister, said he expected hardliners to ban more newspapers and possibly outlaw the Participation Front, led by the President's brother, Mohammad Reza Khatami, and another reformist group, the Mujahideen of the Islamic Revolution Party.

Hundreds die as runaway fuel train explodes in Iran

Nishapur (Iran), Feb. 18 (Reuters): Runaway train wagons laden with a lethal cocktail of fuel and fertilisers crashed into a village in northeast Iran today, blowing up and killing at least 183 people, a toll officials expected to rise.

The wagons of petrol, fertiliser and sulphur products careered down the line, derailed, caught fire and later exploded as firefighters and villagers crowded nearby.

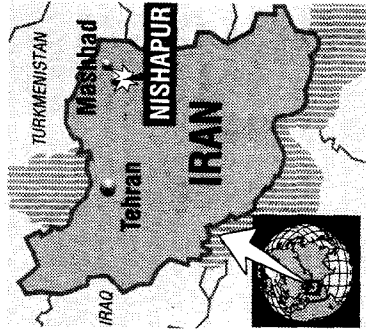
State news agency Irna said tremors in the quake-prone region set the unmanned column of 51 wagons moving, but other officials said the tremor could have been the jolt of the blast itself, leaving unclear why the wagons had rolled away.

State television showed flames licking from mangled, charred wagons, with thick black smoke billowing into the sky at the scene in the saffron-growing province of Khorasan bordering Turkmenistan.

"Some 183 bodies have been recovered and others still may be buried under the rubble of a nearby village," said Hassan Hadiani, a spokesman from the governor's office in Nishapur, 20 km from the blast.



Rescuers carry a body at the scene of the train disaster in Khayyam near Nishapur, Iran. (AFP)



He said 260 injured had been taken to hospital and all blazes had now been extinguished in the stricken area close to the city of Nishapur, hometown of medieval poet Omar Khayyam — whose name the stricken village, Khayyam, carries.

Many of the wounded had severe burns and doctors were calling for urgent blood supplies.

The disaster comes amid political uncertainty, two days ahead of disputed elections in a country still recovering from a December earthquake that killed over 40,000 people in the ancient citadel city of Bam, some 650 km further south.

Irna said five villages were

ravaged in the early morning blast. Ambulances and rescue helicopters rushed to the scene.

Revolutionary Guards cleared a security cordon of a kilometre around the blast site.

Television showed overturned carriages jumbled beside the tracks, with homes just metres away. Mangled pickup trucks littered the area and dazed onlookers stood around in one village on a dusty plain, with snow-capped mountains in the distance.

Fire crews had rushed to the scene to combat a smaller initial blaze when the wagons blew up in a giant explosion.

Windows were shattered for

more than 10 km around and the earth could be felt shuddering up to 70 km away.

One official told Irna the dead included villagers and some of the more than 200 firefighters who had been battling the blaze.

Irna said the governor general of Nishapur was killed in the blast along with the head of the city's electricity board, the fire chief and a 26-year old Irna journalist.

In the worst rail crash of the last quarter century, at least 575 people died in June 1989 when two passenger trains in Russia's Ural mountains were engulfed in an explosion from a leaking gas pipeline.

Ebadi backs reformists, not to vote

18/2

5/3

L.A. Times

Tehran, Feb. 17 (Reuters): Nobel peace prize winner Shirin Ebadi said today she would not vote in Iran's parliamentary election this week because of the mass disqualification of reformist candidates.

"I will not vote myself because I don't know those who have been qualified. I'm not ready to vote for someone I don't know," the human rights lawyer said in an interview. Her comment was a blow to efforts by the country's Islamic authorities to mobilise a big turnout on Friday despite widespread public apathy and anger among reformists at the virtually blanket ban on their contenders.

"The first principle of democracy is that people should have the right to vote for anyone they want," she said. The exclusion of some 2,500 contenders by an unelected Guardian Council of hardline Muslim clerics had "damaged people's freedom to vote", Ebadi said.

Supreme leader Ayatollah

Ali Khamenei called for a massive turnout in a public sermon last Friday, saying it would give the enemies of the Islamic republic a slap in the face.

President Mohammad Khatami, a moderate reformist, appealed to Iranians yesterday to cast their ballots despite "some unfairness" to prevent a hard-line minority from seizing control of the country's fate.

His own brother, Mohammad Reza, is among some 80 sitting lawmakers who were barred from seeking re-election and heads the main reformist party, the Islamic Iran Participation Front, which has said it will boycott the poll.

Ebadi said she would travel to Italy tomorrow and then to Brussels to meet European Union officials and human rights organisations, but she made clear her decision not to vote was a political gesture.

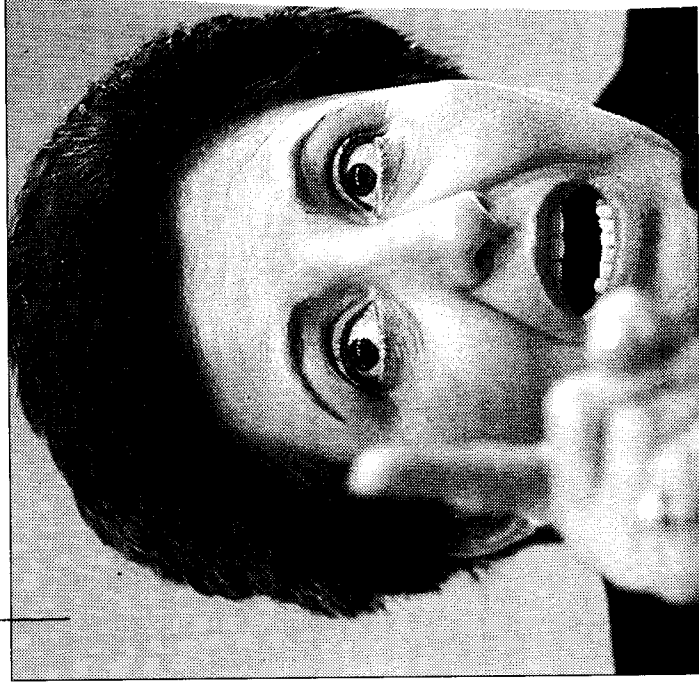
Asked if it was her personal protest, she said: "Yes. I wish that anyone who wanted to run

for office was approved to compete." Ebadi said the outgoing reformist-dominated parliament had made little progress on improving human rights because the 12-member Guardian Council, half of whose members are hand-picked by Khamenei, had vetoed key legislation.

For example, parliament had voted to approve a global convention outlawing discrimination against women but the council had blocked it. Khatami's power to effect change was limited by the constitution, she said.

Ebadi suggested the constitution, which enshrines the power of the clerical establishment over democratic institutions, would have to be amended before serious progress on human rights was possible.

"People want them to eliminate discrimination based on sex, people want more freedom of speech, people want more democracy, people want more respect for human rights," she said.



Shirin Ebadi: Tough stand

Saddam trial not likely in two years

15 1912

The Guardian
Baghdad, February 16

SADDAM HUSSEIN is unlikely to stand trial for at least another two years, *The Guardian* has learned.

The Iraqi special tribunal for crimes against humanity is months away from hearing its first case, and the first trials in October are likely to be of senior Ba'ath Party officials.

"I think it will take two years to get to Saddam being tried," said Salem Chalabi, one of the architects of the court and a nephew of the influential Iraqi exile Ahmad Chalabi, head of the Iraqi National Congress. The need to select and screen judges, prepare courts and establish guarded jails to hold the suspects have led to delays. "There are frustrations," said Chalabi.

The court has to balance the demand of most Iraqis for a rapid show trial of Saddam and his deputies with the need to establish an impartial model for the new judiciary. "It is a balance that we have to work here between trying to protect defendants' rights and meet international standards of due process of law."

He said he was under pressure from US officials to limit the tribunal's cases "for political reasons" — apparently because they want to avoid further alienating Iraq's Sunni community, from which Saddam and most of his close aides are drawn. "The US wants us not to make it more than 30 or 50 (cases). I envisage 300."

In Saddam's trial, prosecutors are likely to focus on around a dozen of the most heinous accusations, including the Anfal campaign with deadly gases against the Kurds in the late 1980s, the crushing of the 1991 uprising, ethnic cleansing and persecution of the Shias.

Not all Ba'athists who committed crimes can possibly be brought be-



HUSSEIN WHO? President George Bush jokes with Ben Affleck at a car rally at Daytona Beach in Florida on Sunday.

fore the court and Iraqi officials hope to run some kind of reconciliation effort. "If we try and chase all the criminals who caused harm to Iraqi people there will be an infinite chain of cases," said Nawar Nasser, chief judge at a Baghdad court.

Unlike the international courts set up in the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda, the Iraqi tribunal will be run by the Iraqis. Each trial will have five judges. There will be a

team of 20 "investigative judges" to draw up evidence against suspects and a nine-member appeal court. Plea-bargaining will be permitted. Crimes involving murder and rape will be punishable by death — by hanging for civilians and by firing squad for army officers.

PoW status
Iraq will ask the US to change Saddam's status as a PoW and to hand him to Iraqis for trial, the foreign

minister said. "We have agreed with the US and the coalition that whenever we are ready as Iraqis, and especially after we regain power, we will demand changing Saddam's status," Hoshiyar Zebari said.

PoW status under the Geneva Conventions grants Saddam certain rights, including access to visits by the International Red Cross and freedom from coercion of any kind during interrogations.

Stoned Saddam ordered attack on Kuwait

SADDAM HUSSEIN was probably high on drugs when he decided to invade Kuwait in 1990, a former chief of protocol has said.

Issam Rashid Walid, whose book *In Saddam's Shadow* is due to be released in French soon, also said that Saddam had amassed a fortune of about \$35bn through various front companies he set up, including many in the Brazilian car industry.

"Saddam was heavily into drugs. He began in 1989, with cannabis, and then when he seized power (in 1979), he used heroin at times. He decided to invade Kuwait because he was probably not in his normal state. He was on drugs which made him lose his mind."

Walid also recounted that Saddam ordered that one of his advisers be devoured by a flabberman pinfisher.

In continued violence, in Iraq, a roadside bomb ripped through a convoy in Bagdada killing a US soldier and wounding four others. Two children were wounded by an explosion at a Baghdad school.

AFP, Paris

100 prisoners set free

20 dead in Fallujah corps raid

55-11 1572 W. A. 11
ASSOCIATED PRESS

FALLUJAH (Iraq), Feb. 14. — Dozens of guerrillas stormed an Iraqi security compound and a government building, freeing prisoners, in an attack that killed 20 people and wounded 30, police and hospital officials said. The same compound was attacked two days earlier during a visit by US Gen John Abizaid.

Up to 50 attackers went from room to room of the Iraqi Civil Defence Corps compound in Fallujah, throwing grenades and firing automatic weapons, said a police officer. The attackers freed around 100 prisoners held in the compound, the officer said on condition of anonymity. It was not known if the prisoners included members of the anti-US insurgency. The gunmen also attacked the mayor's office, police said. Iraqi security forces traded fire with the attackers in the streets, taking cover behind concrete blocks amid a hail of gunfire. No American forces could be seen. US command said US troops could be quickly dispatched to trouble spots to help Iraqi forces as America hands over security to Iraqis.

Mr Abdul Hamid al-Janabi, a security official at Fallujah hospital, said 18 police and civilians died, along with two attackers.

Forces won't leave soon

WASHINGTON, Feb. 14. — US defence secretary Mr Donald Rumsfeld has said that the US-led coalition forces would not leave Iraq soon after the proposed transfer of sovereignty to Iraqis by 30 June.

"The June-July timetable (for transfer of sovereignty) does not involve security forces. It involves governance and the transfer of sovereignty," he told the House Defence Appropriations Subcommittee yesterday. — PTI

US engineers seal Saddam 'bunker'

TIKRIT, Feb. 14. — US Army engineers have sealed the underground bunker where former Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein was captured to prevent it becoming a tourist attraction, a military spokesman said today. Soldiers lowered a 136 kg slab of concrete over the hole earlier this month, said Master Sgt Robert Cargie, a spokesman for the 4th Infantry Division, "to limit human traffic" to the spot. — AP

THE STATESMAN 15 FEB 2004

Bush names Iraq inquiry panel

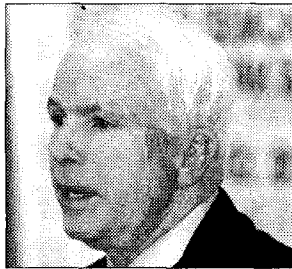
THE TIMES, LONDON

WASHINGTON, Feb. 7. — Mr George W Bush named a bi-partisan panel yesterday to investigate the failure of pre-war intelligence in Iraq, but gave it until five months after the US presidential election to report.

The US President diluted its focus on the absence of Iraqi weapons of mass destruction by ordering the commission to examine all intelligence-gathering on the threat from WMD. It will examine intelligence on North Korea and Iran and also files on Libya and Afghanistan from the Clinton era, he said.

Mr Bush sidestepped the issue of whether the panel would examine the handling of intelligence by the White House. But Mr John McCain, the Republican Senator and one of seven panel members, said it would look at the political decisions that led to the Iraq war. He, however, added that he believed Mr Bush "did not manipulate any kind of information for political gain of otherwise".

The President said he was "determined to figure out why" US intelligence was so wide of the mark. He stopped short of agree-



Senator John McCain said the panel would look at the political decisions behind the Iraq war.

THE COMMISSION

- Laurence Silberman, former judge (co-chair)
- Chuck Robb, former Democratic Senator (co-chair)
- John McCain, Senator
- Lloyd Cutler, former White House counsel
- Richard Levin, president of Yale university
- William Studeman, former CIA director
- Pat Wald, former US Appeals Court judge
- Bush can name another two members

ing with Mr Kay that the weapons did not exist, saying instead that intelligence assessments "have not been confirmed". But he said the greatest threat to the USA came from WMD, adding: "The

Straw ducks this one

BANGALORE, Feb. 7. — British Foreign Secretary Mr Jack Straw today ducked a question by a BBC reporter.

"On what date did you know that the so called 45-minute claim on Iraqi chemical and biological weapons applied only to battlefield (short range) weapons and not longer range ones? This is a matter of great interest in Britain", the reporter asked.

"I think this is a matter of great interest to your news desk, actually! And I congratulate you for reading it word perfect, but I just say, thank you very much. I think this has been dealt with some length in the UK. But at least, you can tell your news desk you tried," Mr Straw said. — PTI

standard of intelligence gathering and analysis must be equal to that challenge." Mr McCain, an independent-minded Republican, was the best known name on the panel. He has described the build-up to war as "an intelligence failure".

গোয়েন্দা তথ্য বুঝতে ভুল হয়েছিল: ব্ল্যার

লন্ডন, ৫ ফেব্রুয়ারি— ইরাক-যুদ্ধের আগে সাদাম হুসেনের গণবিধবংসী অস্ত্রভাণ্ডার নিয়ে যে গোয়েন্দা তথ্য পাওয়া গিয়েছিল, তার একটা গুরুত্বপূর্ণ অংশই তিনি বুঝতে ভুল করেছিলেন বলে মনে নিয়েছেন ব্রিটিশ প্রধানমন্ত্রী টনি ব্ল্যার। তবে, ব্ল্যার এ কথা বললেও, তাঁরই মন্ত্রিসভার সহকর্মী এবং ইরাক-যুদ্ধের কটুর সমর্থক প্রতিরক্ষামন্ত্রী জেফ হুন্ অবশ্য, প্রধানমন্ত্রীর বক্তব্যকে বিশেষ গুরুত্ব দিতে চাননি। তিনি জানিয়ে দিয়েছেন, শুধু মাত্র ওই দাবির (৪৫ মিনিটের) উপরে ভিত্তি করেই ইরাক-যুদ্ধে যাওয়া হয়নি।

গত কাল হাউস অফ কমন্সে হাটন কমিশনের রিপোর্ট নিয়ে বিতর্কের সময় ব্ল্যার জানান, মাত্র ৪৫ মিনিটেই ইরাক গণবিধবংসী অস্ত্র মোতামেন করতে পারে বলে যে দাবি ইরাক গোয়েন্দা তথ্যে করা হয়েছিল, তা যে রণাঙ্গনে ব্যবহৃত সাধারণ অস্ত্র সম্পর্কে প্রযোজ্য এবং দূরপাল্লার ক্ষেপণাস্ত্র সম্পর্কে নয়, সেটা তিনি বুঝতে পারেননি। তাই গত মার্চে ইরাক যুদ্ধের পক্ষে তিনি যখন পার্লামেন্টের সমর্থন আদায় করছিলেন, তখন তিনি প্রকৃত সত্যটাই জানতেন না। ইরাকের মারণাস্ত্র সম্পর্কে গোয়েন্দা তথ্য নিয়ে নিরপেক্ষ তদন্তের নির্দেশ দেওয়ার ঠিক এক দিন পরেই ব্রিটিশ প্রধানমন্ত্রীর এই চাক্ষু্যকর স্বীকারোক্তি যে ইরাক-বিতর্ককে নতুন মাত্রা পাবে, তাতে কোনও সন্দেহ নেই।

ভাঙব তবু মচকাবো না-র নীতি নিয়ে ব্ল্যার ইরাক-যুদ্ধের সমর্থন করে বলেছেন, রণাঙ্গনে ব্যবহৃত অস্ত্র যদি জৈবিক, রাসায়নিক বা পারমাণবিক হয়, তা হলে সেটা নিঃসন্দেহেই হবে গণবিধবংসী মারণাস্ত্র। পাশাপাশি, আত্মপক্ষ সমর্থনে হাটন কমিশনের কথা তুলে তিনি বলেন, কমিশনের রিপোর্টে সরকারকে ইরাক নিয়ে গোয়েন্দা তথ্য অতিরঞ্জনের দায় থেকে অব্যাহতি দেওয়া হয়েছে।

হুন্ বলেছেন, “সেই সময় (গত মার্চ) এই দাবিটি নিয়ে বিরাট কোনও বিতর্ক হয়েছিল বলেও আমি মনে করতে পারছি না।” তিনি এ-ও জানান, ব্ল্যারের চেয়ে

তাঁরা কাছে এই বিষয়ে অনেক বেশি তথ্য ছিল এবং সেই তথ্যে কোনও অসঙ্গতি ছিল না বলেই তাঁর বিশ্বাস।

এ দিকে, ইরাক-যুদ্ধের বিরোধিতা করে মন্ত্রিসভা থেকে পদত্যাগ করা প্রাক্তন ব্রিটিশ বিদেশমন্ত্রী রবিন কুক অবশ্য ব্ল্যারের মন্তব্যে বিস্মিত। তিনি বলেছেন, ব্ল্যার ওই যুদ্ধাস্ত্র সম্পর্কে ঠিক বুঝতে পারেননি, এটা তাঁর বিশ্বাস হয় না। কুক বলেন, “ইস্কাফা দেওয়ার সময়ে আমি বক্তৃতায় স্পষ্ট বলেছিলাম, গোয়েন্দা তথ্যে সাধারণ যুদ্ধাস্ত্রের কথাই উল্লেখ রয়েছে এবং সাদামের কাছে সম্ভবত কোনও ধরনেরই মারণাস্ত্র নেই।”

ওয়াশিংটনের খবর, মার্কিন প্রেসিডেন্ট জর্জ বুশ নিজেকে এবং টনি ব্ল্যারকে প্রাক্তন ব্রিটিশ প্রধানমন্ত্রী উইল্টন চার্চিলের সঙ্গে তুলনা করে বলেছেন, চার্চিল যেমন ‘অশুভ শক্তি’র হাত থেকে বিশ্বকে বাঁচানোর জন্য লড়াই করেছিলেন, তাঁরাও প্রায় সেটাই করছেন। চার্চিলকে নিয়ে মার্কিন কংগ্রেসের গ্রন্থাগারে একটি প্রদর্শনীর উদ্বোধন করতে এসে বুশ ইরাক যুদ্ধের যৌক্তিকতা বোঝাতে গিয়ে এ কথা বলেন। তাঁর দাবি, সন্ত্রাসবাদের বিরুদ্ধে লড়াইয়ে তাঁরা দায়বদ্ধ এবং চার্চিলের মতোই দৃঢ়প্রতিজ্ঞ।

ইরাকে এখনও পর্যন্ত কোনও রকম মারণাস্ত্রের সন্ধান না-মেলায় বুশ-ব্ল্যার দু’জনেই নিজের নিজের দেশে প্রবল বিতর্কের মুখে পড়েছেন। চাপে পড়ে দু’জনেই এই বিষয়ে নিরপেক্ষ তদন্তের নির্দেশ দিয়েছেন। — রয়টার্স, পি টি আই

Iraq dossier doubts were ignored, says official

The Guardian
London, February 4

INTELLIGENCE CHIEFS ignored warnings from their own experts that they could not be certain Iraq had chemical and biological weapons, a former intelligence official who gave key evidence to the Hutton inquiry claimed on Wednesday.

In comments likely to increase pressure on the government over the issue, Dr Brian Jones, a former head in the Defence Intelligence Staff, said most senior officials may have "misinterpreted" key evidence on Iraqi arms programmes.

In the House of Commo-

ns on Wednesday, heckling by anti-war campaigners suspended the Hutton debate as Tony Blair defended his government's role in the Iraqi WMD dossier. At least four protesters shouted "no more whitewash" at regular intervals, causing the Speaker to halt the debate for a break.

Dr Jones laid out his claims in the *Independent*, which said he suggested that not a single defence intelligence expert backed Blair's most contentious claims on WMDs, though there is no proof of this.

The expert claimed that a large part of the DIS was unhappy with the way raw

intelligence was being used without "careful caveats".

Dr Jones said he and a colleague formally complained about the Iraq dossier because they feared that they would be made "scapegoats" after the war when no weapons were found. His claims came as MPs were preparing to debate in the Commons Lord Hutton's findings from his inquiry into the death of weapons specialist Dr David Kelly.

Hutton's report largely exonerated Blair over Kelly's death and cleared him of "sexing up" the dossier. Critics later condemned it as a "whitewash". Dr Jones's claims also followed

the PM's announcement on Tuesday of an inquiry into the Iraq intelligence.

The article gives an account of the extraordinary tensions within the intelligence services in the run-up to the publication of the Iraq weapons dossier in September. It also casts new doubt on the role of the Joint Intelligence Committee and its chairman.

At the time, Dr Jones headed the branch within the DIS which was responsible for analysing all intelligence on nuclear, chemical and biological warfare. He described his team as the "foremost group in the west" on the subject.

The DIS was told that the Secret Intelligence Service, MI6, had other intelligence to back up the claims but it was considered to be so sensitive that it was "compartmented" and not shown to the other agencies.

Dr Jones's article is likely to raise fresh concerns that JIC chairman Scarlett became too close to the Downing Street "magic circle" around Blair and his then communications chief, Alastair Campbell. Hutton had acknowledged that Scarlett and other officials may have been "subconsciously" influenced by Blair's call for the dossier to be as strong as possible.

Biggest blunder since Suez The Iraq war is the "greatest blunder" in British foreign policy since the 1956 Anglo-French invasion of Suez, former British foreign secretary Robin Cook told the *Independent* daily.

"The war has neither disarmed a single WMD nor diminished the terror threat to British interests. It has, though, undermined the UN's authority, divided us from our partners in Europe and damaged our status in the Third World, especially among Muslim countries," wrote Cook, who resigned his ministerial post last March to protest at British involvement.

Khamenei orders review of poll disqualifications

TEHERAN, FEB. 4. Iran's supreme leader has ordered a review of the thousands of disqualified candidates for the legislative elections, a government spokesman said on Wednesday.

Ayatollah Ali Khamenei's move is a bid to defuse a crisis that has seen two major organs of state lock horns over the elections due on Feb. 20.

The reformist Government of the President, Mohammad Khatami, has refused to stage the polls unless the disqualifications are overturned. The hard-line Guardian Council has refused to withdraw its disqualification of about 30 per cent of the 8,200 people who applied to run in the polls.

In comments later on Wednesday, Ayatollah Khamenei rebuked public servants who had threatened to have

nothing to do with the elections and accused reformists of bullying. The news of Ayatollah Khamenei's review order came a day after he was reported to have rejected a request by President Khatami for the elections to be postponed. Spokesman Abdollah Ramezanzadeh said the Ayatollah agreed to the review in a meeting with Mr. Khatami on Tuesday. "We hope to achieve a final result as soon as possible that would allow us to hold an election with a huge turnout," Mr. Ramezanzadeh told reporters.

"I think we can expect some positive results tomorrow," he added. He did not elaborate.

Mr. Ramezanzadeh's announcement was the first in days that suggested the elections might go ahead as planned. — AP

THE HINDU

5 FEB 2000

PM bows to pressure, calls for Iraq WMD probe

MIKE PEACOCK & KATHERINE BALDWIN
LONDON, FEBRUARY 3

B RITISH PM Tony Blair buckled under growing pressure on Tuesday, calling an inquiry into the quality of British intelligence about banned Iraqi weapons after Washington set up its own probe into the reasons given for war. "I think it is right... that we have a look at the intelligence that we received and whether it was accurate or not," Blair told a senior Parliamentary committee. Until now, he has firmly resisted calls for an inquiry although no banned weapons have been found, months after Saddam Hussein was toppled.

A move by President George Bush to appoint a commission on US Intelligence — confirmed on Monday — turned up the heat on Britain to do the same. Foreign Secretary Jack Straw will make a statement to Parliament at 12:30 GMT, spelling out details of the inquiry.

The official government line that evidence of weapons could yet be found has been increasingly hard to sustain as the Chief US weapons hunter David



Tony Blair answers questions by the Parliamentary Liaison Committee on Tuesday. Reuters

Powell expresses doubts about case for Iraq war

WASHINGTON: Secretary of State Colin L. Powell said on Monday that he does not know if he would have recommended an invasion of Iraq if he had been told it had no stockpiles of banned weapons. Asked if he would have recommended an invasion knowing Iraq had no illicit weapons, Powell replied: "I don't know, as it was the stockpile that presented the little piece that made it more of a real danger to the world." He said that the "absence of such a stockpile changes the political calculus and it also changes the answer you get."

— LAF/WP

the political decisions taken to wage war, rather than focus exclusively on problems with the intelligence received.

The minority Liberal Democrats are insisting on the former, Blair has refused. Their dispute delayed a formal announcement of the cross-party probe which had been expected late on Monday. "We are still hoping to get the agreement of the Liberal Democrats," Blair said. "We do not in my view need an inquiry into the political decision to go to war." It would, he said, look at the way intelligence was gathered, then evaluated and used by government.

Meanwhile, Australian Prime Minister John Howard acknowledged on Tuesday that US and British intelligence on WMDs, upon which his government relied to join the war against Iraq, may have been wrong. "In the fullness of time it might be demonstrated that the advice was inaccurate," Howard said. "We can't be absolutely certain (that the intelligence was wrong). Obviously the evidence is not pointing strongly in the other direction." Howard's latest comments come amid mounting pressure at home for an inquiry into Australia's intelligence on Iraq.

— Reuters

BBC cuts satire against Blair

PETER GRIFFITHS
LONDON, FEBRUARY 3

THE BBC said on Tuesday it had cut part of a satirical radio show which called PM Tony Blair a liar, but denied it had been cowed after losing a feud with the government over the Iraq war.

It said it had deleted four lines from an episode of "Absolute Power", a comedy which pokes fun at spin doctors. In one line, a PR man says there is nothing he could teach the PM about deception, manipulation and lying — except how to do it properly. A BBC spokeswoman said the programme was

recorded live in December and that parts would now "sound a bit odd, knowing the outcome of Lord Hutton's report". It is to be broadcast on Thursday.

Some legislators and analysts voiced fears the BBC would muzzle reporters and writers after Hutton to avoid angering Blair's government.

The show's writer, Mark Taverer, said BBC had "chickened out" and that satire was still in. "They are worried about upsetting the government," he said. "I was told I couldn't refer to Blair as a liar because Hutton said he wasn't — clearly this is nonsense."

— Reuters

Iran bans anti-hawk protests by students

Iran (1)
Agence France-Presse
Tehran, February 3

IRANIAN AUTHORITIES have banned the first planned student protest against the wholesale barring of reformist election candidates, the student news agency ISNA said on Tuesday, quoting the Tehran governor's office.

"No gathering will be allowed outside the entrance of Tehran university," the agency quoted Ali Taala, director of political and security affairs for the Tehran region as saying.

"No authorisation for a rally at that spot has been issued for several years because of traffic problems in the district," he added, implying that a demonstration could be organised in other circumstances.

15 4/2/04
The pro-democracy Islamic Association of Tehran's branches in the main and medical universities on Tuesday said they had requested a permit to stage a gathering at the gate of the capital's main campus on Wednesday.

So far students, a driving force behind the embattled reformist movement, have largely kept out of the three-week-old political crisis sparked by powerful conservatives who have disqualified large numbers of reformists from contesting the February 20 elections.

Last week, Iran's main pro-democracy student movement — the Office to Consolidate Unity (OCU) — called for a nationwide boycott of the polls and demanded a referendum on the country's political future.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES 4 FEB 2004

Iran reform

party to boycott elections

Tehran, Feb. 2 (Reuters): Iran's largest reform party said today it would boycott a February 20 parliamentary election, turning up the heat on hardliners in the Islamic republic's worst political crisis for years.

Iran's reformists are enraged by the decision of the Guardian Council — an un-elected constitutional oversight body run by religious hardliners — to declare more than 2,000 would-be lawmakers unfit to stand in the election. More than 120 reformist lawmakers resigned from parliament yesterday and President Mohammad Khatami's reformist government has called for the vote to be postponed.

"We have no hope that a fair, free and legitimate election can be held on February 20. So in the current circumstances we cannot participate," Mohammad Reza Khatami, head of the Islamic Iran Participation Front (IIPF) party, said.

He added the party, one of the main backers of his brother the President, would only put forward candidates for an election if the candidate bans were overturned and the vote was delayed to allow more time for campaigning. He said that while the IIPF was not calling on Iranians to abstain from voting, turnout would inevitably be very low.

The Guardian Council's move has led to international concern about the vote's legitimacy and overshadowed celebrations to mark the 25th anniversary of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini's return from exile to create an Islamic state.

More than 80 deputies in the reformist-dominated 290-seat parliament are among those barred from the election.

Should the Guardian Council — comprised of 12 clerics and Islamic jurists — reject the election delay request, Khatami's government could refuse to organise the vote. Khatami could also allow provincial governors, who play a key role in administering polls, to carry out their threat to resign over the issue. "If the government holds the election on February 20 it would not be a reformist government anymore," the IIPF's Khatami said.

Bush and Blair in backtracking mouse

Prez orders probe into pre-war intelligence

The New York Times & AFP
Washington, February 2

US PRESIDENT George Bush, bowing to election-year pressure, announced on Monday that he was launching an investigation into pre-war charges that Saddam Hussein's Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction.

"I am putting together an independent, bipartisan commission to analyse where we stand, what we can do better as we fight this war against terror," he told reporters as he met with his Cabinet.

Bush said that he wanted to hear directly from former chief US weapons hunter David Kay, who has said that stockpiles of unconventional arms did not exist on the eve of the US-led March invasion, before creating the panel.

The bipartisan commission will examine US intelligence operations, including a study of possible misjudgments about the WMDs, senior Administration officials had said on Sunday. The panel would also investigate failures to penetrate secretive governments and stateless groups that could attempt new attacks on the USA.

The President's decision came after a week of rising pressure on the White House from both Democrats and Republicans to deal with what the head of the Senate Intelligence Committee has called "egregious" errors that overstated Iraq's stockpiles of chemical and biological weapons. The decision represents a remarkable aboutface by the Administration.

A senior Administration official said late on Monday night on condition of anonymity that the commission, which is expected to have nine members, will probably report its findings in 2005, well after the presidential elections.

A panel of "distinguished citizens who have served their country in the past" are expected to lead the inquiry, modelled on the Warren commission which re-examined the Kennedy assassination.

Officials said the commission Bush will create as a broader examination of US intelligence shortcomings — from Iran to North Korea to Libya — of which the Iraqi experience was only a part.

The pressure to establish such a panel became irresistible after Kay told the Senate Armed Services Committee last week that "it turns out we were all wrong, probably" about the Iraqi threat, which was Bush's basic justification for the war.

Bush has previously resisted calls for an independent probe, insisting the Iraq invasion had moved a danger to the US and the world. But Kay's comments over the past week have rallied opposition Democrats, who hope growing doubts about the case will bloody Bush's re-election bid.

"It became clear to the President that he couldn't sit there and seem uninterested in the fact that the Iraq intel went off the rails," said a senior official. "He had to do something, and he chose to enlarge the problem, beyond the Iraq experience."



REUTERS
An injured Kurdish girl, who survived Sunday's suicide bombings, at a hospital in Arbil on Monday. Crowds collected outside the offices of the rival Kurdish parties — where 56 people were killed in twin suicide attacks — after Monday's 10 prayers to pay their respects to the dead.

PM set for climbdown on weapons inquiry

The Guardian
London, February 2

DOWNING STREET appeared on Monday to be on the brink of a climbdown over granting an inquiry into the intelligence basis for the war in Iraq.

Following the announcement in Washington on Sunday night that George Bush had ordered an investigation into evidence of Iraqi WMDs, No. 10 on Monday said it was on the point of making a statement to Parliament on the subject.

That could come either later on Monday or, quite possibly, as Blair is questioned by the heads of select committees on Tuesday morning. No further details were immediately available, but the Prime Minister's official spokesman did concede that the verdict of Lord Hutton last week had changed the debate: "What's different between last week and this is that the Hutton report has cleared the government of allegations of having politically interfered with, falsified or hyped the intelligence on WMD. That allows us to address — hopefully in a more rational way, a more rational context — the perfectly valid question that people have asked about WMD."

"And while the Iraq Survey Group's former head David Kay's interim report did find evidence of WMD programmes and did find evidence of concealment, it's equally true, as the PM has acknowledged, that

we have yet to find WMD weapons in Iraq and we recognise these are valid questions. We are coming close to announcing how we will approach these questions (at the announcement to Parliament."

The shift comes after an upping of the pressure over the weekend, with Michael Howard warning Blair on Monday that he would be the "odd man out" if he now refused to call an independent inquiry. Howard said he believed Saddam posed a risk to global security, and military action was justified anyway. But, he said, the "important thing is whether we can in future have confidence in the intelligence material which is available."

Howard, backed by the Liberal Democrat leader, Charles Kennedy, tabled a Commons motion calling for a review of British intelligence material. The Liberal Democrats, the third major political party, backed the calls for a thorough investigation. "Washington is now dictating the British political agenda," said spokesman Menzies Campbell.

The move comes as a senior Government source told The Guardian that Blair would this week change tack on the absence of WMD in Iraq, acknowledging the need to explain the failure rather than just repeat the mantra of "waiting for the Iraq Survey Group to report". The Prime Minister also faces a day's debate on the Hutton report on Wednesday.

Iranian reformist MPs resign

Agence France Presse

TEHERAN, Feb. 1. — A group of 117 Iranian reformist MPs today resigned in protest at the mass barring of candidates from forthcoming elections, plunging the Islamic republic into one of its worst-ever crises amid what were supposed to be 25th anniversary celebrations.

In a damning statement read out during a stormy Majlis session carried live on national radio, the deputies accused powerful hardliners of seeking to impose a Taliban-style religious dictatorship.

"We cannot continue to be present in a parliament that is not capable of defending the rights of the people and which is unable to prevent elections in which the people cannot choose their representatives," they said.

The statement, read out by prominent reformist MPs Mr Mohsen Mir-damadi and Mr Rajab-Ali Mazroui, accused conservatives of "installing

an Islam comparable to that of the Taliban" — a cutting jibe given Shi'ite Muslim Iran's hatred of the ousted Sunni fundamentalist Afghan militia.

The hardliners behind the mass barring of election candidates from the 20 February polls were also labelled as "traitors".

"We will not participate in this election," the deputies wrote in their statement. Parliamentary sources said 117 deputies had submitted signed copies of the letter.

In a symbolic move, the resignations coincided with the hour and day of the return from exile 25 years ago of Iran's revolutionary leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. Iran is currently gearing up for official celebrations marking the 1979 revolution.

After being swamped with resignation letters, pro-reform Majlis Speaker Mr Mehdi Karubi admitted the three-week-old crisis had hit a dead-end and appealed for the Islamic republic's supreme leader,

Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, to step in.

"We are in a deadlock," Mr Karubi said. "The Supreme Guide must intervene to solve this problem." Khamenei has the final say on all matters of state, and he directly or indirectly appoints all 12 members of the Guardians Council, the political vetting body that has disqualified large numbers of reformists from standing in the Majlis elections.

The supreme leader had already intervened in the bitter crisis, by telling the Guardians Council — a body fiercely opposed to the reformists' bid to shake up the way Iran is run — to be less stringent.

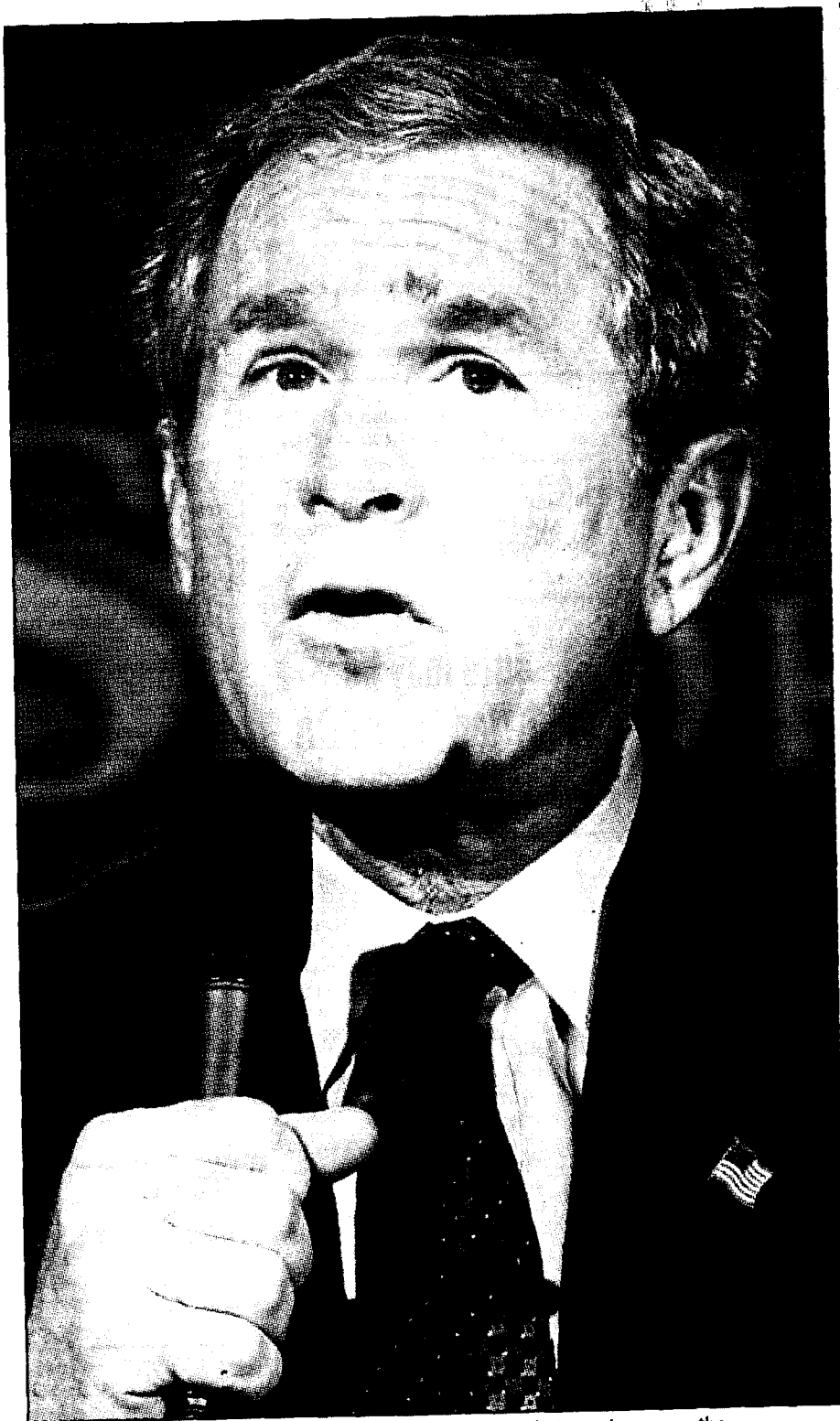
The 12-member council had initially barred 3,605 would-be MPs. It reduced that number by around 1,100 in a drawn-out appeals process, but has not reinstated some 80 sitting MPs hoping to stand for re-election or any prominent pro-reform figures and allies of embattled President Mohammad Khatami.

THE STATESMAN

2 FEB 2004
2 FEB 2004

Clouded vision

Intelligence failures built up as Western spies gave in to the mistrust of Saddam, says Martin Woollacott



Both George Bush (above) and Tony Blair inherited from their predecessors the consequences of a decade-long Anglo-American struggle against Saddam Hussein

THE RUSH of experts and politicians this week to finally admit that US and British intelligence estimates of Iraqi weapons holdings were wrong underlines the fact that the invasion of Iraq was not conjured from thin air in the few months before it began. It did not come about simply because a handful of forceful advocates found themselves in positions of influence in Washington, or merely because the US administration was looking for a course of action after the twin towers attack. It was also the consequence of a decade-long Anglo-American struggle with Saddam Hussein, one that both Bush and Blair inherited from their predecessors.

Aerial attacks and surveillance, coup attempts, economic sanctions, and Iraqi responses, were aspects of the struggle. But at the core was an intense contest between US and British intelligence and Iraqi counter-intelligence, the most significant espionage battle since the Cold War.

The concentration on the interaction between politics and intelligence in the immediate run-up to the invasion has until now obscured the need for an examination of this much longer period of conflict, without the legacy of which the war could not have happened. President Bush, Colin Powell, Condoleezza Rice, and even Geoff Hoon have all recently conceded to one degree or another that pre-war intelligence was wrong, but none have probed the concepts which shaped US and British policy for many years before a second Iraq war.

In Britain, the Hutton report's rejection of the argument that the available intelligence was exaggerated by politicians may have let the government off too lightly. But it does have the virtue of showing that the government and intelligence services had essentially the same mindset on Iraq. That mindset was exemplified by David Kelly himself. Dr Kelly was a veteran, and indeed a hero, of the intelligence war against Saddam, and his view seems to have been the same as that of most such veterans: that Saddam almost certainly had some limited stocks of chemical and biological weapons, some capacity to restart production, some very limited means of delivery, and some hidden but very scaled down research programmes. The importance of these supposed stocks and programmes was not that they were that dangerous in themselves but were evidence of Saddam's long-term intentions.

Hard evidence, such as might be constituted by participants at a high-level meeting, was not, as far as is known, ever acquired. This is the critical point: the intelligence assessment of Iraq was fundamentally an assessment of Saddam's character. In a sense, he was the weapon of mass destruction, so obdurate was his will to

possess such weapons assumed to be.

This understanding of Saddam's demonic intentions was forged literally in the heat of the desert as inspectors waited fruitlessly for entry to military installations or watched as trucks made off with the equipment or the documents they had wished to examine. The contest was undoubtedly at first very much to do with Saddam's efforts to conceal weapons stocks and programmes.

But it was a contest also to do with his need not to be seen to be humiliated, and with his need to outwit those he believed were plotting his downfall. Why otherwise continue to play a shell game when there was virtually nothing under the shells? Why deny inspectors entry into the palaces when they housed no weapons? Why precipitate the departure of inspectors from Iraq when there was no longer anything to find? Much that Saddam did could have been designed to produce the impression that he wished to preserve his programmes so that he could restart them as soon as he had the resources to do so.

As we now realise clearly, the conviction that Saddam would not and could not change was at the heart of the Iraqi crisis. For many inspectors and western intelligence people it became a given, and it survived the increasing evidence that his WMD programmes were either abandoned or so run down and under-resourced as to be no longer a cause for major concern.

That, we may speculate, did not change their inner conviction, formed in the early to mid-1990s, that, since Saddam himself was inherently untrustworthy, the possibility of Iraq acquiring WMD, particularly nuclear weapons, could only be removed if he was removed. It is possible that US and British intelligence became essentially a process of sifting information to buttress this view.

We knew then and we know now that the US and British governments believed Saddam had some minor WMD holdings and expected to find them, or encounter them in battle. They were not lying when they said this, yet it was not the reason they went to war. If that reason was principally to do with weapons, it was to do with weapons not yet made.

There was probably a moment after Saddam's recovery from his defeat in Kuwait when he could have convinced his western opponents that they could live with him. Instead he cheated, convincing US and British intelligence that he was incorrigible and that the only guarantee of disarmament would be his removal. That conviction may not have been wrong, but it looks as if it may never have been sufficiently tested or questioned.

The Guardian

Murky manoeuvres

سفر به 29/11 W. Amin Oghran
Iranian liberals must struggle to survive

Had Ayatollah Khomeini been alive now, he may not have recognised the kind of place Iran has become a quarter century after the revolution. A post-revolution baby boom has ensured that a majority of Iranians are young people who have only a faint memory of the revolution but greater exposure to contemporary cultural and political trends. Iran's Majlis, or parliament, is in disarray as 3,600 out of 8,157 candidates aspiring to contest national elections on February 20 have been removed from the fray, a list that includes 80 out of 290 current Majlis members. The accusation against them is that they do not respect enough the Islamist principles of the republic.

While the disqualifications target liberal and reformist candidates selectively and would ensure victory for pro-clergy conservatives if sustained, the use of theocratic strictures to distort the popular franchise is discrediting the principle of theocratic governance itself. Indeed there is considerable disillusionment with reformist deputies themselves as most reform attempts have been successfully blocked despite reformists being returned twice to the Majlis with massive majorities. Deputies are now staging a sit-in in front of parliament to protest the disqualifications, but President Mohammad Khatami is sending mixed signals — he has asked the deputies to withdraw the sit-in, and also threatened that his government will resign if the disqualifications are not withdrawn.

Holding elections from which roughly half of all candidates are barred is a recipe for political chaos, as it would force disenfranchised politicians to embrace the democracy movement on the streets which has been able to stage large protests. Any new government would be illegitimate not only at home but also internationally — French foreign minister Dominique de Villepin has called on Teheran to release political prisoners, who are mostly liberal dissidents. In the Khomeini days international hostility was compensated by domestic support, but that is no longer the case. Perhaps these ground realities weighed on supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei when he asked the 12-member Guardians Council to revise the disqualifications list.

But the Guardians Council is an unelected body and its members owe their appointments to Khamenei; it is most likely, therefore, that the Council's list had had Khamenei's prior approval. The disqualifications and their revision at Khamenei's behest may be a reminder to reformist deputies who hold the whiphand. Khatami looks too mild-mannered to protest effectively. He may be an Iranian Gorbachov, the question is whether a Yeltsin can arise among the reformists.

29 JAN 2004

THE STATESMAN

Baghdad blast kills four

Associated Press

5/1-3 2/11

BAGHDAD, Jan. 28. — Four people were killed when a suicide bomber driving a van disguised as an ambulance blew up his vehicle today in front of a hotel here frequented by Westerners, witnesses and police said. The US command, however, said only the driver was killed.

Seventeen people were injured in the explosion at the Shaheen Hotel at 6.40 a.m. (local time) after security guards fired on the vehicle — a white van with Red Crescent markings — as it manoeuvred around concrete barriers in the street, witnesses said.

The vehicle then exploded, gouging a huge crater in the street, shattering the ground floor of the three-story hotel and damaging at least three other buildings nearby.

At least 10 cars parked along the street were severely damaged, some reduced to mounds of twisted metal. The blast hurled remains of one car

15 Apr 01 9 am

across the street. Others were set afire.

Residents of the hotel include the labour minister, Mr Sami Izara al-Majoun, who was unhurt. "My guards came to the room and rushed me downstairs. The hotel was burning and there was fire and smoke everywhere," he said.

Mr Al-Majoun said some foreigners were staying in the hotel but didn't know their nationalities or profession. He said he saw injured people including one foreigner being led out of hotel in the melee.

The hotel is located in the Karadah neighborhood which includes several foreign embassies, including the Swiss, the Polish and army vehicle bombing in Baghdad since 18 January, when 31 people were killed in a blast at a main gate to the headquarters of the US-led coalition. Most of the dead were Iraqis.

At least five hotels used by foreigners in Baghdad have been attacked by insurgents in the past with car bombs, rockets and other explosive devices and underscore the precarious security situation prevailing in Baghdad.

THE STATESMAN

THE STATESMAN

2 2 JAN 2004

US and UN envoy hold talks on Iraq's future

1 **Baghdad:** Top US government members held talks with UN envoy Lakhdar Brahimi at the White House on a possible UN role in Washington's planned handover of power to Iraqis in June. In the latest violence in Iraq 11 people were killed by guerrillas in the central so-called Sunni Muslim "triangle," but a US general said on Thursday insurgents had become only a sporadic threat. Two US soldiers were among the dead.

"I believe within six months I think you're going to see some normalcy," US Major-General Raymond Odierno told reporters at the Pentagon by a video link from Iraq. A US official said US secretary of state Colin Powell and national security adviser Condoleezza Rice had discussed with Mr Brahimi the "way forward on the political process in Iraq and how the UN can contribute to that."

President George W. Bush, seeking re-election in November with Iraq high on the campaign agenda, has run into opposition over his handover plans from the long-oppressed majority Shiite Muslims, who are demanding elections to decide the process. The Bush administration,



US army soldiers of the 82nd Airborne Division roll up their unit's flag during a handover ceremony in Baghdad on Friday

which had previously resisted any major UN role in postwar Iraq, invited Mr Brahimi for the talks. Washington is pressing the former Algerian foreign minister, now an adviser to UN secretary-general Kofi Annan, to lead UN teams to Iraq to study the feasibility of holding elections in a few months' time and other options. Reuters

THE TIMES OF INDIA

24 JAN 2004

24 JAN 2004

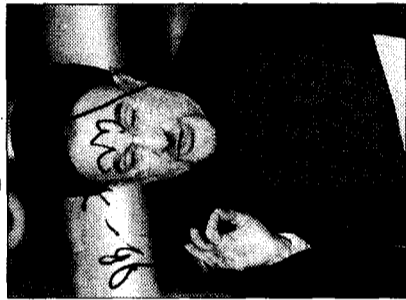
Khatami says Iran has never sought WMD

ALISTAIR LYON *WFO*
 DAVOS, JANUARY 22

IRANIAN President Mohammad Khatami said on Wednesday his country had never sought to acquire weapons of mass destruction. "Iran has never been after WMDs," Khatami told a news conference at the World Economic Forum at the Swiss ski resort of Davos.

The US has long suspected Iran of pursuing atomic weapons under cover of a civilian nuclear energy programme. The IAEA last November condemned Iran over an 18-year cover-up of atomic research and said it would not tolerate any future breach of its non-proliferation obligations.

"We vehemently oppose the manufacture and produc-



Khatami addressing the WEF in Davos on Thursday. AP/PTI

tion of nuclear weapons. For this reason we extend sincere and honest cooperation with the IAEA," Khatami declared.

Iran agreed in October to suspend its uranium enrichment programme and accept intrusive international inspec-

US expert unconvinced N Korea can make nukes

WASHINGTON: A US scientist who visited North Korea's nuclear facilities said on Wednesday that he was not convinced the communist state could turn its nuclear technology into a weapon or mount it on a missile. But Siegfried Hecker, former head of Los Alamos National Laboratory said Pyongyang's programme was still of great concern.

Hecker told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee that North Korea probably could make plutonium metal and that 8,000 spent fuel rods were missing from a storage area at the country's nuclear complex at Yongbyon. He also said that a plant for reprocessing nuclear bomb-grade fuel was in good repair, that scientists had the expertise needed to reprocess plutonium, and that a five megawatt nuclear reactor was "operating smoothly" and adding to the country's plutonium cache by 6 kg a year.

—Reuters

tions. In response to a question, Khatami said: "I categorically deny that there was shipment of nuclear material by North Korea to Iran. We have nothing to hide." He said Iran would continue to cooperate with the IAEA, but had the right to de-

velop the peaceful use of nuclear energy. "We also expect our friends throughout the world to fulfil their commitments to us," he added, referring to provisions under the NPT Treaty for the sharing of nuclear technology

for peaceful purposes. He said US "Noise and fanfare" had had no effect on Tehran's decision to sign the additional protocol with the IAEA allowing for intrusive inspections, but said dialogue with Europe on the issue had helped achieve progress. Khatami, who earlier made a speech lauding the benefits of dialogue in world affairs, was asked whether he would meet US Vice-President Dick Cheney, due in Davos later in the week.

"The dialogue I talked about was a dialogue between scholars and wise men," he replied. He said Iran had not sensed that Washington was ready yet for a dialogue based on mutual respect, but noted there had been "changes of tone" which he hoped were not just a tactical ploy. —Reuters

Iran has no WMD, says Khatami

Davos (Switzerland), Jan. 21

(Reuters): Iranian President Mohammad Khatami said today that Tehran had never sought to acquire weapons of mass destruction.

"Iran has never been after weapons of mass destruction," Khatami said at the World Economic Forum in Switzerland.

"We vehemently oppose the manufacture and production of nuclear weapons. For this reason we extend sincere and honest cooperation with the IAEA (International Atomic Energy Agency)," he said. In response to a question, Khatami said: "I categorically deny that there was shipment of nuclear material by (North) Korea to Iran. We have nothing to hide."

Earlier in Tehran, Khatami today ruled out resigning over a ban on liberal candidates standing in parliamentary elections and said he would do all he could to ensure a free and fair vote next month. "I have the intention to continue my task and my service to the people," Khatami said.

Iranian Vice-President Mohammad Ali Abtahi had said Khatami and his reformist government were ready to quit over the hardline Guardian Council's decision to bar nearly half of 8,200 hopefuls from the February 20 vote.

Abtahi later clarified that his remarks repeated previous comments by Khatami that reformists should either stick together or leave together.

THE TELEGRAPH

27 JAN 2004

Iran poll ban row simmers

Tehran, Jan. 20 (Reuters): Iran's Guardian Council revealed today it had so far reversed only a tiny fraction of its bans on candidates for parliamentary elections despite a poll boycott threat by reformist President Mohammad Khatami's party.

The 12-man unelected conservative watchdog has barred nearly half the 8,200 candidates from running for the February 20 elections. Allies of Khatami, including 80 of the standing 290 MPs, have been most affected.

Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who has the last word on all state matters, has urged the Council to review its decisions, but it has been in no apparent rush to lift bans and has until the end of the month to review 3,100 appeals.

"So far...200 (disqualified) candidates have been approved," said a statement on the Council's website. The figure represents about 5 per cent of the bans.

The disqualifications sparked a bitter political dispute. Apart from the poll boycott threat by Khatami's party, government ministers considered resignation and liberal MPs have reached the 10th day of a parliamentary sit-in.

Khatami, in a letter carried by the official IRNA news agency, said he was optimistic about the chances of a fair election but stressed the hardliners'

constitutional supremacy. "The Guardian Council is the top decision-making body. We will observe its revised rulings," he wrote in the letter that made no reference to his party's threatened boycott.

Firebrand MP Fatemeh Haqiqatjou said the row between reformists and conservatives had reached breaking point and the outcome would determine whether the country's Islamic constitution could survive.

"This is the climax of a confrontation between the elected and the appointed...on how to run the country," she was quoted as saying on IRNA. "The elected bodies are the representatives of the people and their will is the will of the people. They must be the true defenders of the people's rights," she added.

Algeria blast

Skikda (Algeria), Jan. 20 (Reuters): At least 27 workers died when a gas plant blew up at Algeria's largest refinery complex on the Mediterranean coast and brought its key oil and gas activities to a halt, officials said today.

Officials at the scene said they believed an accident at a gas boiler caused the blast which injured 74 people.

THE TELEGRAPH

21 JAN 2004

21 JAN 2004

Shiites stage huge rally in Baghdad seeking polls

Baghdad: Tens of thousands of Shiite Muslims marched peacefully in the capital on Monday to demand an elected government, as US and Iraqi officials prepared to seek the UN secretary-general's endorsement of American plans for transferring power in Iraq.

It was the biggest display of Shiite political power in Baghdad since the collapse of Saddam Hussein's regime last April. Secretary-General Kofi Annan has been reluctant for the UN to play a greater role in Iraq until Washington agrees to greater responsibility here and until he is convinced the country is safe. Underscoring those dangers, 31 people were killed and about 120 were injured when a suicide bomber blew up his truck on Sunday at a gate to the headquarters compound of the occupation authority in Baghdad, Iraq's health minister, Khudayer Abbas said on Monday.

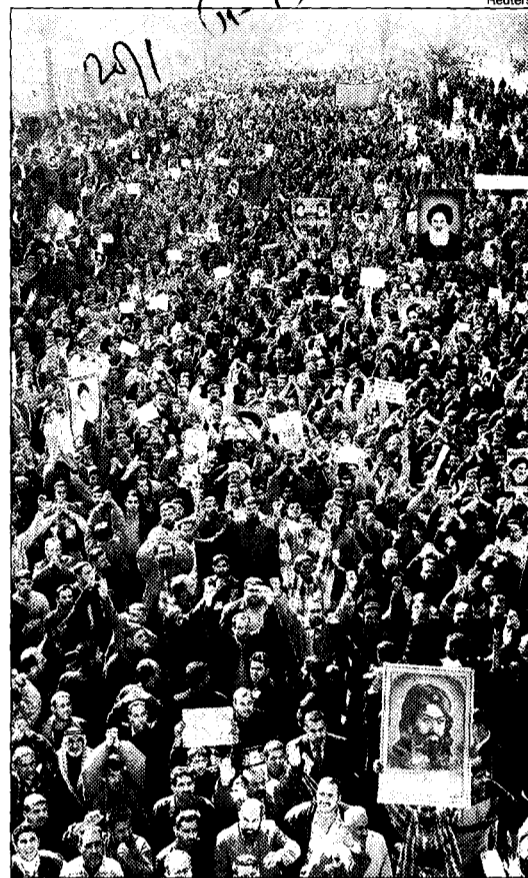
Huge crowds of Shiites, estimated by reporters at up to 100,000, marched about five km to the University of al-Mustansariyah, where a representative of Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Husseini al-Sistani delivered a speech which he said was directed at Mr Annan, the US occupation authority and its Iraqi allies. Al-Sistani, the country's most influential Shiite leader, has rejected a US formula for power transfer through a provisional legislature selected by 18 regional caucuses, insisting on direct elections instead.

The legislature is supposed to appoint a transitional government, which will take over from the US-led coalition administration on July 1 before full elections in 2005. "The sons of the Iraqi people demand a political system based on direct elections and a constitution that realises justice and equality for everyone," al-Sistani's representative, Hashem al-Awad, told the crowd. "Anything other than that will prompt people to have their own say." The crowd responded by chanting: "Yes, yes to elections. No, no to occupation."

"What our religious leadership is doing today is at the heart of its mandate," cleric Faras al-Tatrasani, 36, said. "We are demanding democracy. And that's what America came to give us." Iraqi police said they had no estimate about the size of the crowd, but it was formidable. Crowds of Shiites were joining the rally throughout the day. Two US military helicopters hovered low over the demonstrators but otherwise there was no sign of American soldiers. Scores of armed Iraqi police stood by.

"This demonstration is a message to America that we want elections," said Naim Al-Saadi, a 60-year-old tribal chief and one of the demonstrators. Many marchers linked hands. Others carried portraits of al-Sistani and other Shiite leaders and waved computer print out banners saying "Real democracy means real elections."

About 30,000 Shiites had held a similar demon-



Thousands of Iraqi protesters march through Palestine Street in Baghdad on Monday to demand elections.

stration for elections on Thursday in the southern city of Basra, a Shiite-dominated region. Shiites are believed to be 60 per cent of Iraq's 25 million people but were suppressed by Saddam's Sunni dominated government. They fear the provisional legislature will cut them out of power again. The growing clamour for political rights by the majority Shiites is ratcheting up pressure on the US-led coalition administration and its Iraqi allies trying to control the guerrilla violence, blamed on Sunni minority insurgents loyal to Saddam.

US and Iraqi Governing Council officials say it is not possible to hold free and fair elections before the July 1 deadline given the precarious security situation. US officials hope Mr Annan will support that view following his meeting on Monday with chief administrator L. Paul Bremer and members of the US-appointed Iraqi Governing Council. AP

Iraq sends US scurrying to Annan

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United Nations, Jan. 19 (Reuters): The US and Iraqi leaders asked the UN today to salvage their strategy in Iraq and send a mission to Baghdad to advise on the feasibility of elections now or suggest a compromise.

UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan said he was considering the proposal but told reporters further discussions were necessary before he could make a decision on sending what he called a "technical" team immediately.

The request came from the Iraqi governing council, which took the lead in several hours of meetings with the UN and the

US-led occupation authorities.

As the meetings began at the United Nations, tens of thousands of Shias marched in Baghdad to support a demand by Iraq's most revered Shia cleric, Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, for an elected provisional government rather than indirect elections through caucuses, as Washington proposed.

Sistani's aides have requested that the UN help straighten out the impasse and suggested a visit, although Annan said earlier there was too little time for direct elections before June 30 when a provisional government is to take office.

Elections are planned before 2005 for a permanent government.

"We would like a technical committee to be sent to look into and consider the matter of elections in Iraq," said Abdul Aziz al-Hakim, a Sistani ally, who held the rotating presidency of the governing council in December.

Annan told reporters that, "The issue now is whether the technical, political or security conditions exist for general direct elections to take place as early as May this year. Both the governing council and the CPA representatives have expressed a strong wish that the UN should

quickly send a technical mission to Iraq to advise on the feasibility of elections within the next few months, and, if not, what alternative may be possible," Annan said.

But he said further discussions were needed, after which, "I would be in a better position to take decisions about what the UN can do to help."

The Bush administration would like the team to be led by Lakhdar Brahimi, the former Algerian foreign minister, who has just finished a two-year stint in Afghanistan and will become a UN adviser in New York. Diplomats said Bremer spoke to

Brahimi early today but no conclusions were announced.

Annan himself called today's meeting to, in his own words, get some "clarity" on a future UN political role in Iraq. The session included Paul Bremer, the American administrator in Iraq, his British counterpart, Jeremy Greenstock, and a delegation from the US-appointed Iraqi governing council, led by its current president, Adnan Pachachi.

Annan has said repeatedly that safety conditions in Iraq were too dangerous since he ordered out international staff in October, following two attacks on UN offices in Baghdad.

Iraqis unite in call for elections

Reuters
Baghdad, January 19

TENS OF thousands of Shias marched through Baghdad on Monday demanding elections in a clear signal to Iraq's US Governor as he prepared to tell the United Nations that any vote is impractical until next year.

UN officials led by Secretary-General Kofi Annan met a delegation of Iraqi Governing Council and Paul Bremer to discuss the role the world body is expected play in the days leading up to self rule by June 30. The meeting was convened by Annan who wanted the US to clarify what it expects the UN to do.

After shunning the United Nations when it took military action against Iraq, Washington now wants the world body to come to its rescue as security situation continues to be difficult and Shias are demanding elections to elect provisional government. They have already rejected the US plan which would have a caucus to discuss the handover.

The talks come a day after a suicide bomb blast at the gates of the US-led administration compound in Baghdad which killed at least 25 people, according to Iraqi police. US officials said two American contractors were believed to be among those killed in the deadliest attack since Saddam Hussein's capture.

Underlining the demand for a military presence and US efforts to get allies to share that task, Japanese soldiers entered Iraq, the vanguard for a mission that marks a historic shift from Tokyo's avoidance of conflict since World War II.

Bremer and the Governing Council are likely to press Annan to send a team of experts to help convince supporters of Iraq's most revered Shia cleric, Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, that his call for direct elections is not feasible now.

Under the US plan, regional caucuses will select a transitional assembly by end-May, and this will in turn pick an interim sovereign government by end-June. Full elections would follow after



Tens of thousands of Iraqi protesters march down Baghdad's Palestine Street on Monday demanding elections and an end to US rule.

the writing of a constitution in 2005.

But many Shias, who make up about 60 per cent of Iraq, want elections sooner. Many thousands waved banners and shouted slogans in support of Sistani in Baghdad. "The people are with you, Sayyed Ali," the crowd chanted. "Yes, to

UN, yes, to elections."

"Just as there are elections in Europe and US there should be elections here," said demonstrator Qarar al-Bahadiri. "America says it is democratic and brings freedom to countries. Then it should bring us elections. Especially

as we lived through 35 years of darkness, we need to have an election that represents the people."

US troops kill 3 civilians: US troops killed two Yemenis and a Syrian who fired on them on Monday during a raid searching for weapons in a house in

'Saddam stashed millions in Syria'

AFP
Beirut, January 19

SADDAM HUSSEIN'S ousted regime stashed \$200 million in Syrian banks, President Bashar al-Assad said on Monday, but he insisted the money would not be returned until Baghdad settled its debts with Damascus.

Saddam, now in US custody in Iraq, is suspected by Washington of having deposited about three billion dollars in state-owned banks in Syria as well as in Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey, according to US press reports.

"The operation to quantify the amount has been completed, and it is now just an accounting problem, as there is money due to Syria by the Iraqi side... That should be settled," Assad said in an interview with the pan-Arab *al-Sharq al-Awsat* newspaper.

Asked if the amount of Iraqi money was around three billion dollars as claimed by press reports, he said: "No, about \$200 million."

"We did not open bank accounts for them, but they were allowed to review, as experts, financial statements related to the Iraqi side, in line with the UNSC resolution we voted for," Assad said.

Baghdad, police at the scene said. Pools of blood were visible on the ground around the house.

In another incident in Karbala, witnesses said one man was killed and 13 wounded on Sunday when a hand grenade was hurled at a crowd.

Khatami threatens to boycott polls

RF 15 20/1 w. Asim D 2/20/01

The Guardian & Reuters
Tehran, January 19

PRESIDENT MD Khatami's political party has threatened to boycott Iran's parliamentary elections unless the ban on hundreds of aspiring liberal candidates are promptly overturned, newspapers reported on Monday.

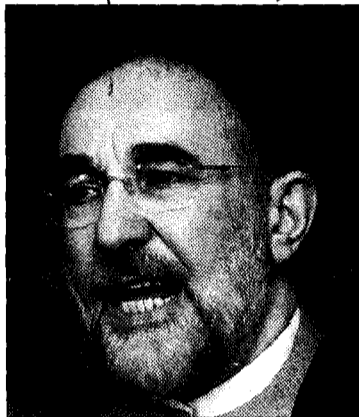
The February 20 parliamentary vote has been thrown into doubt by the decision of the hardline Guardian Council - an unelected body with sweeping powers - to bar half of 8,200 hopefuls from running.

The vast majority of those disqualified were allies of Khatami, whose attempts to deliver reforms since his 1997 election have been hindered by hardliners opposed to any watering down of Iran's Islamic values and political system.

The Guardian Council's move has prompted threats to resign by government ministers and Governors and led dozens of liberal MPs to stage an 8-day sit-in in Parliament.

Reformists accuse the Guardian Council of trying to influence the outcome of the election so conservatives can win back control of parliament which they lost to reformists in 2000. "If the ban is allowed to stand, it will mean a defeat for reformists and a renewal of dictatorship," said MP Ali Tajernia.

Khatami's pro-reform League of Combatant Clerics, following a



Iran President Mohammad Khatami

meeting of its central committee on Sunday, decided that "if the current situation, under which not all legal factions can compete freely, continues, there is no reason for the League to take part in the elections," liberal newspapers reported.

Khatami once attracted the kind of adoration celebrities enjoy in the west, but those days are long gone. The electoral crisis gripping Iran shows why Khatami no longer enjoys such reverence, and why so many former supporters are disillusioned with his cautious approach. The smiling cleric who set out to reform Iran's theocracy has proved unable to fulfil high expectations that met his victory six years ago.

Iraq suicide blast kills 25

HPI 1911 W. Area (1)

Reuters
Baghdad, January 18

A SUICIDE bomber blew up a car laden with half-a-tonne of explosives outside the main US headquarters in Baghdad on Sunday morning, killing at least 25 people and leaving 60 injured as they waited to enter the base.

The attack in the heart of the Iraqi capital came a day before a key meeting in New York between the UN, Iraq's governing council and US and British officials on the country's political future.

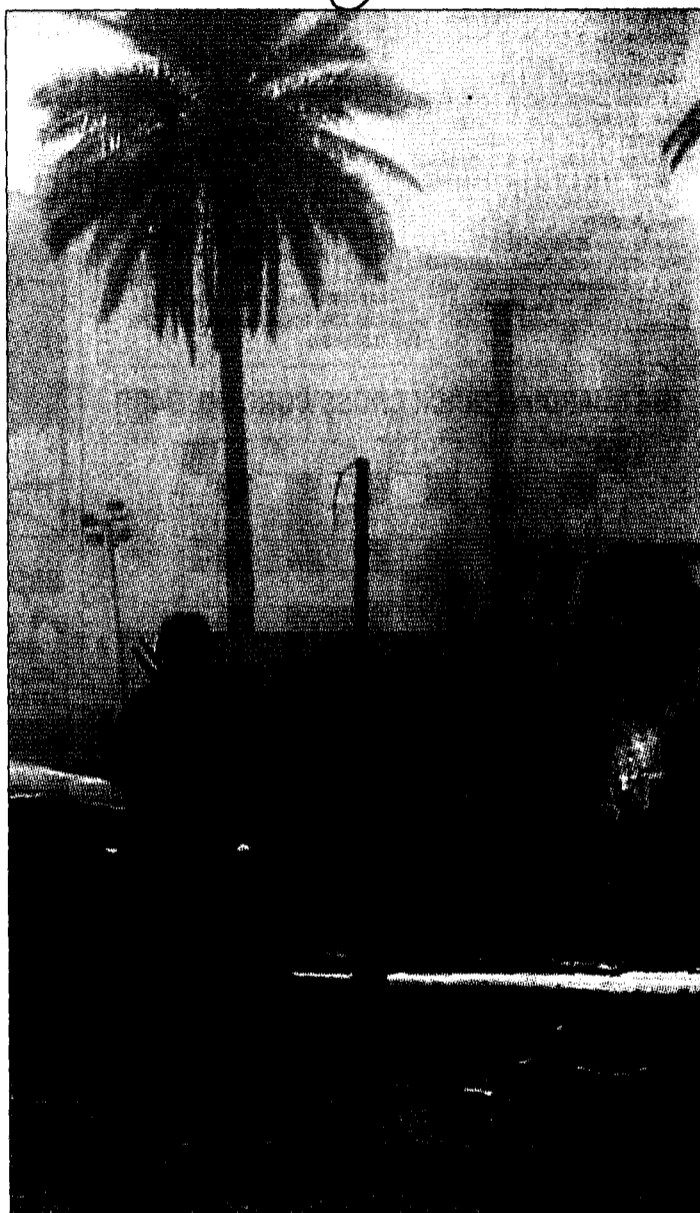
The bomb exploded right outside the main entrance to the 'Green Zone', formerly Saddam Hussein's Republican Palace complex in Baghdad and now the top-security civilian and military headquarters of the US-led administration.

Col Ralph Baker, a US military spokesman, said a pickup truck packed with 454 kg of explosives was detonated outside the gate, which the Americans call the Assassins Gate. Cars were on fire in the street after the blast and victims lay on the ground in pools of blood. A stream of ambulances ferried away the wounded through the early-morning mist.

US Army spokesman Capt Jason Beck said two of the dead were US department of defence employees, but he did not know their nationalities. The wounded included six Americans — three soldiers and three civilians.

Many of the victims were workers who had lined up waiting to be picked, said one witness. "I was passing by when the explosion occurred," said Wissam Md Shaker. "People were thrown aside, three here, five there." Sunday is a working day in Iraq and the bomb went off just after 8 am.

See also Page 15



Soldiers secure the blast site outside the main gate to the headquarters of the US-led coalition in Baghdad on Sunday.

APR 10 1971

The pictures of Saddam Hussein's capture the US did not want you to see



1 An unsourced snap of the first few minutes of Saddam's capture on December 13, 2003, shows him lying on the floor with a US soldier grasping his collar



2 Hair awry, the once powerful dictator sits dejectedly on a brown arm-chair in the farmhouse that was his hideout in hometown Tikrit, northern Iraq



3 Saddam, with his hands tied, being escorted by an Iraqi security official. US officials refuse to comment on these snaps, which are circulating on the Net

AFP

Khamenei call raises truce hope

Khamenei
Iran *16/1*

Tehran, Jan. 15 (Reuters): Iranian government officials are likely to drop their threats to resign after Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei moved to defuse a row over parliamentary elections, government sources said today.

The resignation threats by officials and 27 state governors were made in protest at the hard-line Guardian Council's decision to disqualify almost half of the 8,200 candidates hoping to run in parliamentary elections on February 20. "To avoid tension in the country, those who have threatened to quit will drop their resignation threats," said an official among at least 16 members of President Mohammad Khatami's cabinet who said this week they would step down.

Most of those disqualified were reformist allies of Khatami, including more than 80 members of the 290-seat parliament.

The confrontation between reformists and hardliners, the most dramatic since Khatami carried reformers to power in a 1997 presidential poll, prompted a sit-in protest by dozens of MPs and calls for the elections to be postponed. But Khamenei, using his overriding political authority, moved to defuse the crisis yesterday, calling on the Guardian Council to review the cases of those barred from standing.

A second government source said that following Khamenei's comments, "those who had



Iranian President Mohammad Khatami (left) with Abdel-Aziz al-Hakim, a member of Iraq's governing council, in Tehran. (AP)

threatened to resign will have to withdraw". He said that President Khatami would in any case not accept their resignations.

In a further sign that tension was easing, protesting reformists cancelled a large rally scheduled for today, and the dozens of MPs staging a sit-in at parliament said they welcomed Khamenei's intervention.

"The leader's remarks were the first positive sign of solving the problem and it should stop this illegal process," Mohammad Reza Khatami, the President's brother and one of the disqualified MPs, told reporters.

Khamenei asks hawks to review candidate ban

W. Amin
9/2/04
15/11

Tehran, Jan. 14 (Reuters): Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei today called on a hardline body to review the cases of thousands of candidates barred from standing for parliamentary elections, state television reported.

Khamenei, whose intervention could defuse a political standoff that has prompted dozens of top reformist officials to threaten to resign, also said incumbent deputies should not have been disqualified unless there was solid proof against them.

"There are legal methods and the Guardian Council has enough time to review the cases carefully... to prevent the violation of anyone's rights," state television quoted Khamenei as saying in a meeting with Guardian Council members.

"Those who have been qualified before should be qualified (now) unless the contrary can be proved," he added.

The Guardian Council, a hardline constitutional watchdog under the direct control of Khamenei, has disqualified nearly half of 8,200 candidates for the February 20 vote.

The vast majority of those vetoed are reformist allies of President Mohammad Khatami, including more than 80 of parliament's current 290 lawmakers.

Around 80 MPs today rebuffed an appeal by Khatami to suspend a four-day-old sit-in protest at parliament. "It's natural for us to continue because we haven't achieved our demands yet," Mohammad Reza Khatami,



Iranian President Mohammad Khatami (centre) and Speaker Mehdi Karroubi (in white turban) with reformist MPs at the parliament in Tehran. (AFP)

younger brother of the President and deputy speaker of parliament, said.

The decision to extend the protest was a further blow to the weakened authority of Khatami, who is also under pressure from cabinet colleagues and state governors to adopt a firmer stance — and to resign, with them, if the bans are not rescinded.

Another MP said: "Khatami didn't have a winning card to offer us. He just wanted us to end the sit-in and see what happens next, which wasn't acceptable to us." He said deputies did not believe Khatami would resign over the crisis, and might urge him to postpone the election if the Guardian Council did not back down.

Even close allies of Khatami, who swept to office in 1997 promising to promote civil rights and the rule of law, criticise him for failing to stand up to hardliners in the judiciary and Guardian Council who have blocked most of his reforms.

Hardliners fear reformist causes such as a free press, free speech and women's rights will undermine the system of clerical rule in place since Iran's 1979 Islamic revolution.

Reformers say they do not want to dismantle clerical rule — only to place more emphasis on the law and citizens' rights.

But many ordinary Iranians have already lost faith in Khatami's ability to overcome conservative resistance, and the public have shown no sign of rallying to the reformists' cause.

Iran's most important pro-reform student body, the Office to Consolidate Unity (OCU), today said the hardline move to bar thousands of candidates proved "the upcoming vote is an appointment disguised as an election." In a statement faxed to Reuters the OCU warned protesting reformists that hardliners may try to split them by reinstating some of their candidates while barring others from the race. It said the political crisis was the "last golden opportunity for reformists and if they miss that opportunity... the public's minimal trust in the reform movement would fade away."

Analysts say the disqualification of candidates was a crude attempt by hardliners to prevent a repeat of the 2000 election.

Saddam warned Iraqis against foreign fighters

The New York Times
Washington, January 14

SADDAM HUSSEIN warned his Iraqi supporters to be wary of joining forces with foreign Arab fighters entering Iraq to battle American troops, according to a document found with the former Iraqi leader when he was captured, Bush administration officials said on Tuesday.

The document appears to be written after Hussein lost power. He cautioned Iraqis against getting too close to Islamic fundamentalists and other foreign Arabs coming into occupied Iraq, according to US officials.

It provides a second piece of evidence challenging the Bush administration contention of close cooperation between Hussein's government and al-Qaida. CIA interrogators have already elicited from the top al-Qaida officials in custody that, before the US-led invasion, Osama bin Laden had rejected entreaties to work jointly with Hussein.

Officials said Hussein apparently believed that the foreign Arabs, eager for a holy war against the West, had a different agenda from the Baathists, who were eager for their own return to power in Baghdad.

The role of foreign Arab fighters in the Iraqi resistance to the US-led occupation has been a source of debate within the US government ever since the fall of Baghdad in April. Initially, American analysts feared that thousands of fighters would flood in to Iraq, seeking an Islamic jihad in much the same way an earlier generation of Arabs travelled to Afghanistan in the 1980's to fight the Soviet occupation.

Military and intelligence officials now believe that the number of foreign fighters who have entered Iraq is relatively small.

In December, US military officials in Iraq estimated that for-

ign fighters accounted for no more than 10 per cent of the insurgency, and some officials now believe that even that figure may be too high. Only 200 to 300 people holding non-Iraqi passports are being detained in Iraq by the US forces, Brig. Gen. Mark Kimmitt, a military spokesman, told reporters in Baghdad in December.

But several officials said US forces were not certain of the accuracy of the American intelligence on the issue and acknowledge that there could be more foreigners inside the country than they currently think.

Another unresolved issue has been the level of coordination be-

tween foreign fighters and Iraqi insurgents, many of whom are former members of Hussein's security apparatus. Military and intelligence officials say they have detected cooperation at the tactical level, on individual attacks, but have less evidence of any coordination at a broader strategic level.

The use of suicide car bombings as a weapon in the insurgency has made US officials wonder whether Islamic militant fighters are behind some crucial attacks. The secular Iraqis who were members of Hussein's government are unlikely recruits for martyrdom, American officials said.



Saddam Hussein

563
19/1/04

Iranian govt threatens to quit

W. Africa

Associated Press

TEHERAN, Jan. 13. — Iran's reformist government has threatened to resign amid denunciations today of a hardline panel's disqualification of candidates for next month's elections who are allied with the reformist President.

In a deepening of the nation's political crisis, the official Islamic Republic News Agency quoted Vice-President Mohammed Sattarifar as saying late yesterday that, "If the government feels that it can't fulfill its responsibilities in protecting legitimate freedoms, such as defending the rights of the nation for free and fair elections, then it does not believe that there is any reason to stay in power." The statement is the strongest yet indicating President Mohammed Khataami's government may be willing to resign if it cannot ensure free elections. However, Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, has promised to intervene if the crisis is not resolved soon.

For a second consecutive day yesterday, legislators who have been disqualified staged a protest in the parliament building.

The Guardians' Council, an unelected hardline con-

USA calls for free polls

WASHINGTON, Jan. 13. — The USA has called for free elections in Iran, asking the government to disavow the interference of the Guardian Council which has barred some liberal candidates from contesting next month's parliamentary elections.

"We support free in Iran, and we are opposed to interference in the poll process. We call upon the Iranian government to disavow attempts by the Guardians' Council to shape the outcome of the 20 February parliamentary elections," state department deputy spokesman J Adam Ereli said.

"Decisions about who should govern a country are best made by the citizens of that nation through an open and transparent process," Ereli said. The options of the people should not be limited by other institutions, so as to prejudge the election or the outcome of an election, he added. "I think we have also made clear that it's important that the voice of the people be heard in Iran."

When a correspondent said the Iranians are going to respond that the US, by such statements, is interfering in Iranian elections, telling them what to do, for the Guardian Council's edict is in accordance with the Constitution, Ereli replied that America thinks it is important that the election process be transparent, fair and open to all. — PTI

stitutional watchdog, has barred over 3,000 of the 8,200 people — including more than 80 sitting lawmakers — who filed papers to run for a seat in the 290-member parliament.

Lawmakers have said that all of those who were disqualified were reformists.

Iran's largest reformist party, the Islamic Iran Participation Front, meanwhile, said in a statement made available today to The Associated Press that disqualifying the reformist candidates amounted to treason because it dam-

ages Iran's international credibility and will result in "sham elections".

Meanwhile, the European Union's foreign policy chief warned that the elections would not be credible unless the disqualifications were set aside.

"The fairness of the elections is the process that leads to elections," said Mr Javier Solana, who is visiting Iran to discuss its relations with Europe. It would be "difficult to explain (to the European parliament) how a lawmaker can't be a candidate".

HT-6 1311

Iran rewinds

W. Africa (D) 9/10/04 ✓

IRAN'S REFORM movement has run into rough weather again. A hardline Islamic religious authority under supreme ruler Ayatollah Ali Khomeini to vet the candidates list for next month's general elections has disqualified half of the 8,200 names in it, including several sitting members of the 290-seat Parliament. Many of those 'rejected' are outspoken critics of Iran's strict Islamic religious political system. It's not surprising, therefore, that the Guardian Council trashed their candidatures. Indeed, the council always had a nasty reputation for playing spoilsport in previous elections, and it has even blocked many reform bills cleared by Parliament just because the hardline orthodox elements couldn't stand the 'R' word.

What is odd, however, is that the council has now so brazenly taken what's probably the most drastic action against reformers in Iran's parliamentary history. An immediate casualty of this would be public interest in the

polls — an excellent yardstick of what the reform movement has, or hasn't, done in Iran. For the turnout of voters in elections has been a crucial defining aspect for Iran's quarter-century-old political system. And if many Iranians keep away from the polls this time, the legitimacy of the system is bound to suffer.

Not that this may bother the hardliners who remain bleakly unimpressed by President Mohammad Khatami's idea of gradual institutional reform in line with the Islamic constitution. Even after two terms in office, Mr Khatami's efforts to push the country's polity and society out of the grip of conservative clerics have not got very far. It's sad that despite having a Constitution, political parties and local and parliamentary elections, democracy is yet to be established in Iran. At a time when the country's struggling to emerge from isolation on the world stage, such political experimentation can be debilitating.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

13 JAN 2004

Reformist protest widens, Khamenei not to intervene

1811 07

Tehran, Jan. 12 (Reuters): Angry Iranian reformists accused Khamenei of threatening the country's future and more MPs joined a protest sit-in after thousands of liberals were barred from standing in elections next month.

But senior officials said a compromise was possible over the bans by the conservative Guardian Council, a constitutional watchdog — a move the party of reformist President Mohammad Khatami said laid Iran open to foreign charges of tyranny. Supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who has the last word on all state matters, said he would only intervene if the conservatives and reformists reached an impasse.

"If the issue goes beyond legal methods and gets to a sensitive point which demands the leader's decision, we will act based on our responsibility," he said on state radio.

EU foreign policy chief Javier Solana, visiting Tehran, criticised the vetoes, saying they would be difficult to explain within the EU.

Iran's reformists are fighting



Former Iranian conservative MP Mohammad Mohammadi-Far (centre) fights with reformists in the parliament in Tehran. (AFP)

for their political survival after the un-elected 12-member Council blocked thousands of Khatami's allies from running in the February 20 parliamentary polls.

"(The conservatives) are paving the way for enemies who want to show the Islamic republic is a despotic state," said a statement from Khatami's

MPs and provincial governors have threatened to resign if the council does not reverse its mass disqualifications.

About 100 MPs were believed to be involved in the protest. One, Reza Yousefian, said the number had been swelled by MPs who had themselves been approved.

Khatami and parliament speaker Mehdi Karubi are taking the case direct to the Guardian Council. Karubi said he was optimistic a deal could be struck and urged MPs to have faith in legal appeals.

"Be careful not to foment tension," he warned them. Demonstrating MPs released a statement that they would settle for nothing less than a completely free election. "We will not let the desires of a few turn the will of the nation," said one, Ali Shakerpour.

The ISNA students' news agency reported that the largest reform party had called on Tehran students, who often back Iran's struggling reformers, to join a gathering later to protest about the Guardian Council's move.

410-19

AMARAH CLASHES / BRITISH SOLDIERS ATTACKED

Joblessness leads to frayed tempers

AMARAH (IRAQ), JAN. 11. Hundreds of Iraqis hurled stones at British soldiers who waded into the crowd wielding batons in this southeastern city on Sunday, the day after clashes that killed six protesters and wounded at least 11.

Screaming protesters, some armed with sticks and shovels, attacked in waves throughout the day, trying to rush troops guarding the city hall. But the British drove them back from the compound that also houses the U.S.-led occupation force and a British battalion.

Booms and flashes exploded in the crowd, believed to be homemade bombs made of tin cans packed with explosives and nails with candlewick lighters.

Soldiers blocked roads and periodically pushed demonstrators back, sometimes with batons, sometimes marching in unison behind riot shields and, against younger protesters, simply shoving them with their hands.

"Yesterday there were more adults with much more violent intent," said British Maj. Johnny Bowron. We are trying to permit a peaceful protest but prevent loss of life or damage to property."

Officials said they were demanding jobs in a city of 400,000 where the biggest employer was the security force of Saddam Hussein.

In the northern city of Mosul, four mortar shells exploded on Sunday at the office of a Kurdish political party, the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan. The blasts damaged the building but caused no injuries, according to party officials.

Two other explosions blasted near the U.S.-led coalition office



Protesters confronting British soldiers during a demonstration in Amarah, Iraq, on Sunday. — Reuters

in the northern oil city of Kirkuk, but police said they appeared to be percussion bombs "aimed at terrorising".

Also on Sunday, authorities said the body of an Iraqi working with the U.S.-led coalition was found in the southern city of Basra, along with another man not associated with the coalition. Resistance forces have targeted U.S. soldiers as well as civilians and Iraqi police working with the occupiers.

In Baghdad, two Estonian soldiers suffered minor injuries when a grenade was thrown at their patrol on Saturday, according to Estonian army spokesman.

The trouble in Amarah, 320 km southeast of Baghdad, started on Saturday when hundreds of Iraqis gathered to protest that authorities had not kept a promise to give them jobs.

They stoned the town hall, shattering windows. Shots rang

out, makeshift bombs were thrown and the British and Iraqi police opened fire. Hospital officials said six people were killed. The British put the death toll at five — with no casualties among soldiers or police.

On Sunday, demonstrators sent a representative to talk to British and Iraqi officials, who promised them 8,000 jobs, according to witnesses.

But protesters said a similar promise made weeks before had not been fulfilled and the clash ensued. Iraqi police were not visible at the scene on Sunday.

On Saturday, the Danish military said Danish engineering troops and Icelandic de-miners found artillery shells near Quarnah, north of Basra, which may contain chemical blister agents. The shells were wrapped in plastic but some had leaked and they appeared to have been buried for at least 10 years, the

statement said.

The shells were sent for further testing to determine if they were chemical weapons, banned in Iraq under U.N. resolutions.

Before the war, the United States alleged Iraq still had stockpiles of mustard gas, a World War I-era blister agent stored in liquid form.

U.S. intelligence officials also claimed Iraq had sarin, cyclosarin and VX, which are extremely deadly nerve agents.

Lack of evidence in a nine-months search since then has led critics to suggest the Bush administration either mishandled or exaggerated its knowledge of Iraq's alleged arsenal.

Mr. Hussein's regime used chemical weapons against Iranian soldiers and killed an estimated 5,000 Kurdish civilians in a chemical attack on the northern city of Halabja in 1988. — AP

Reformers barred from polls in Iran

Agence France-Press

TEHERAN, Jan. 11. — Iran was plunged today after powerful conservatives moved to disqualify large numbers of reformists from standing in next month's crucial parliamentary elections, a move one MP branded a "coup d'etat".

There was uproar in parliament, held for the past four years by moderates loyal to President Mohd Khatami, as it emerged that the Guardians' Council had also barred leading figures in the reform movement, including a brother of the president.

"I consider this rejection of candidates to be an illegal coup d'etat and an act of regime change by non-military means," fumed Mohsen Mirdamadi, head of the parliament's foreign policy and national security commission.

Mirdamadi was one of 85 incumbent reformist MPs who have been barred from stand-

ing in the 20 February elections by the 12-member Guardians' Council, an unelected political oversight body and bastion of the religious right.

He said the bulk of disqualified MPs were found to have been in violation of an article in the electoral law that stipulates candidates must show their commitment to Islam and respect the position of Ayatollah Ali Khamenei as supreme leader.

Mojammad Reza Khatami, the president's brother and head of the Islamic Iran Participation Front (IIPF) — the Islamic republic's largest pro-reform party — said the move was a mockery of democratic values.

The Majlis building, where reformist MPs were gathering for an all-night sit-in, would be transformed into "a centre of resistance against this illegal action," he said.

As one senior politician revealed, a group of up to eight Cabinet ministers had "prepared their letters of resignation" when the President him-

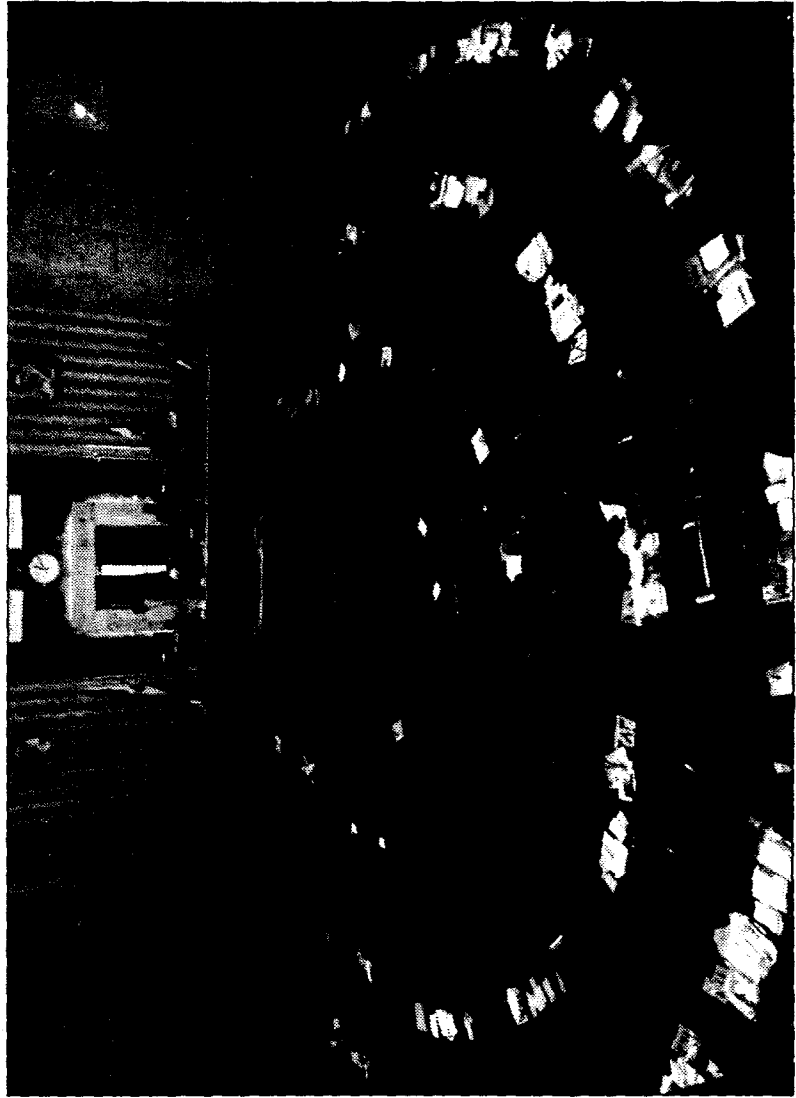
self issued an impassioned appeal for calm.

"Violence must be averted. Inshallah (God willing), with calm, we can solve this problem. We should not do anything to stoke tensions," the President said, alluding to fears that the latest explosion of reformist-conservative tensions could again bring out pro-reform students onto the streets.

And speaking during a stormy Majlis session carried live on state radio, parliament speaker Mehdi Karubi said he and the President were in contact with the Guardians' Council and Ayatollah Khamenei.

Calling on those rejected to "lodge a formal complaint", Karubi said reformers had several channels and time to reverse the decision before a definitive list is published 10 days before the vote.

The 12-member Guardians' Council is a senate-like body that vets all Majlis legislation to see if it complies with Islamic law and the constitution.



An empty parliament after Iranian reformist MPs walked out in protest against the Guardians' Council decision to disqualify large number of reformers from contesting next month's polls. — AFP

No US talks: Iran

Tehran, Jan. 10 (Reuters): Iran said today it had no plans to start talks with its long-time adversary the US, and that American policy towards the Islamic Republic must change.

US secretary of state Colin Powell said yesterday Iran's acceptance of US aid after the Bam earthquake had opened up opportunities for dialogue between the foes although there was no reason to expect a quick political rapprochement. "Now there is no plan for starting negotiations," said Iranian foreign minister Kamal Kharrazi. "US policy towards Iran must change, getting rid of its hostile atmosphere."

"We have said that it is important for the negotiations between the countries to be based on mutual respect and to take place on an equal footing," he added. In the aftermath of the December 26 earthquake in the city of Bam that killed more than 30,000 people, the US relief effort was seen as prompting moves towards improved relations between Washington and Tehran. Washington broke ties with Iran shortly after the 1979 Islamic revolution when radical students stormed the U.S. embassy in Tehran and held 52 hostages for 444 days.

The US has accused Iran of seeking nuclear weapons, of supporting anti-Israeli Islamic militants and of fomenting violence in Iraq. US President George W. Bush said it was part of the "axis of evil" along with North Korea and Iraq under Saddam Hussein.

IRAQ / U.S. FORCES CONDUCT MASSIVE RAID IN TIKRIT

Resistance fighters step up attacks

FALLUJAH (IRAQ), JAN. 9. Rockets slammed into a Baghdad hotel used by Westerners after dawn on Friday, shattering windows and blasting a swimming pool, and U.S. troops in the hometown of the former President, Saddam Hussein, arrested 30 people including a dozen suspected of attacking American soldiers.

The raids in the northern city of Tikrit began hours after a Black Hawk helicopter, clearly marked with a red cross, crashed after a witness said it was hit by a rocket. All eight on board were killed.

In other incidents, at least six people were killed and dozens injured in a bomb blast after Friday prayers at a Shia mosque in the central Iraqi town of Baquba, police sources said. "A gas cylinder with explosives inside was put on a bicycle and left near the mosque," the police sergeant, Haki Ismail Mustafa, said. "At the end of prayers it exploded."

Police and witnesses said the bomb shattered windows and damaged cars outside the small mosque in a residential area. Officials at a nearby hospital said they knew of 39 people injured. U.S. military officials on the scene said they were investi-



U.S. soldiers blindfold Iraqis during a raid in Tikrit, the hometown of the former President, Saddam Hussein, on Friday. — AFP

gating Baquba, 65 km north of Baghdad, is in a largely Sunni Muslim area, which is a hotbed of resistance to the U.S.-led occupation of Iraq. U.S. forces have mounted major operations in and around the town to try to capture insurgents.

In Baghdad, a C-5 transport plane with 63 passengers and crew limped safely back to the airport after being struck by fire from insurgents. Several rockets struck the Bouj al-Hayat Hotel in central Baghdad, shattering windows and causing other minor damage but no casualties. Three attackers drove up at 6 a.m. (local time), blasted three rounds from shoulder-fired launchers and fled, said Hamza Ali, security

Two rockets hit the fourth and fifth floors of the Bouj al-Hayat, where U.N. weapons inspectors stayed last year. A third exploded in the empty hotel pool. Later Friday morning, a homemade bomb exploded on a busy west Baghdad street leading to a U.S. military base, wounding two Iraqis. — AFP

ty chief for the compound.

Two rockets hit the fourth and fifth floors of the Bouj al-Hayat, where U.N. weapons inspectors stayed last year. A third exploded in the empty hotel pool. Later Friday morning, a homemade bomb exploded on a busy west Baghdad street leading to a U.S. military base, wounding two Iraqis. — AFP

Bush to unveil new Moon mission

By Sridhar Krishnaswami

WASHINGTON, JAN. 9. The U.S. President, George W. Bush, is said to be making plans to unveil an ambitious space programme that will see American astronauts back on the Moon, a full fledged space station there and in a much longer term perspective, even to send astronauts to Mars.

The White House has been tight lipped about the President's ideas but unnamed administration officials have been quoted in the media as saying that Mr. Bush's announcement on the subject could be expected by the middle of next week, a week before his State of the Union Message.

If Mr. Bush does indeed have a plan to send back astronauts to the Moon that will be for the first time since 1972; but what is being emphasised is that Mr. Bush is not having any plans to send Americans to Mars, rather merely setting forth a vision to this effect perhaps a decade down the line.

Between July 1969 and December 1972 the United States put 12 astronauts on the Moon. The President's expected proposals is expected to cost the Treasury hundreds of billions of dollars and there are

those law makers in Congress who would want to take a close look at the tab, especially in times of growing budget deficits. In fact it is being pointed out that in 1989 the elder George Bush had called for colonies in the moon and an expedition to the Mars and the price tag at the time was put at around \$ 400 billions to \$ 500 billions.

In the present context, there have been no firm estimates on how much the Moon and Mars expeditions are going to cost; but one estimate is that the Mars expedition alone could come to around \$ 1 trillion. And the exploration of the Moon would depend on what NASA wants to do there.

The President's expected proposals come at a time when there are growing calls from within the political and the scientific community that the United States should be pumping in more resources into the International Space Station and expand facilities there to accommodate a crew of between six and seven persons.

Mr. Bush's vision for a new space programme is likely to be one of his campaign themes and it comes at a time when there have serious setbacks at the NASA.

Saddam is a POW

Agencies

WASHINGTON, Jan. 9.
—The Pentagon has determined that Saddam Hussein is a prisoner of war, a US defence official said today, ending uncertainty about the deposed President's legal status.

In London, a senior British official, also speaking on condition of anonymity, said today that Saddam Hussein had given no useful information to his US interrogators, but documents and papers found in his briefcase had yielded results "far greater than we expected".

Council okays federalism:
In Baghdad, Iraq's interim Governing Council today agreed to a federal structure for the country and to enshrine Kurdish self-rule in three northern provinces.

Blast in mosque kills 5: A bomb exploded near a Shiite mosque in Baqouba in Iraq today as worshippers streamed out after Friday prayers, killing five people. Shiites are in a majority in Iraq.

Iran blames Bush refrain

Tehran, Jan. 9 (Reuters): Iran's influential former President Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani said today US President George W. Bush's repeated accusations against Iran had undermined a possible thaw in the decades-old enmity between the two nations.

Speaking at Friday prayers in Tehran, Rafsanjani said Tehran was encouraged by US humanitarian relief to victims of the devastating earthquake in Bam on December 26 and a US proposal for a first public official visit to Iran in over two decades.

"Our initial analysis was that they wanted to pave the way for negotiations and resolving the problems," Rafsanjani said in a sermon broadcast live on state radio. "Their main mistake was that Bush started to repeat the old allegations about Iran and weapons of mass destruction, terrorism, human rights and the West Asia conflict..."

"If you want to extend a hand of friendship and a new approach, you shouldn't repeat the old words," said Rafsanjani, who analysts say remains a key player in Iran's foreign policy.

He was referring to comments on January 1 by Bush, who, while praising Tehran for

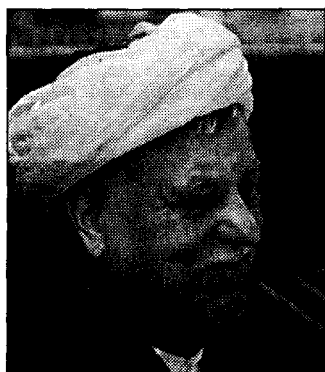
allowing US humanitarian aid to be sent to the people of Bam, reiterated long-standing accusations that led him to label Iran an "axis of evil" member in 2002.

"The Iranian government must listen to the voices of those who long for freedom, must turn over al Qaida (members) that are in their custody and must abandon their nuclear weapons programme," Bush said.

Scarf insult

Rafsanjani today said a French government plan to ban Islamic headscarves from public schools was an insult to all Muslims and hinted the move may harm France's ties with Iran.

"I hope the French government and (President Jacques) Chirac himself, as well as the French parliament understand they have insulted one and half billion Muslims," Rafsanjani said during prayers in Tehran.



Former Iran President Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani during prayers in Tehran. (AFP)

Iran ready for US talks based on mutual respect

Tehran, Jan. 8 (Reuters): Iran's foreign minister Kamal Kharrazi said Tehran was willing to resume dialogue with the US, provided the talks were based on mutual respect, state television reported today.

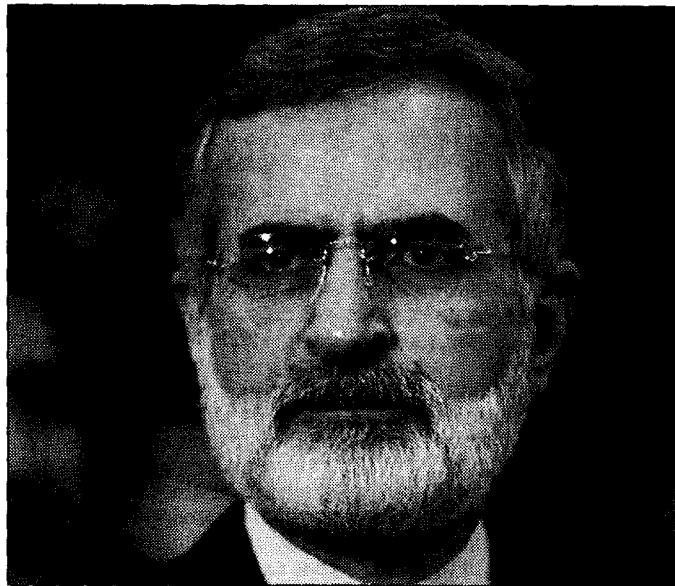
Kharrazi added that Iran's recent negotiations with European countries over its nuclear programme, which culminated in Iran agreeing to snap inspections of nuclear facilities, was an example to Washington of how outstanding problems can be solved.

But Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who has the last word on all state matters, said in a televised speech that deep-rooted problems between the two arch-foes remained and accused Washington of trying to exploit Iran's recent earthquake for political gain.

Speculation has mounted in recent days that the two countries may be edging towards some kind of rapprochement, after US officials spoke of a willingness to resume a limited dialogue on specific issues and Washington sent humanitarian aid to victims of the devastating December 26 earthquake in Bam.

"Iran is ready to negotiate with all countries and America is no exception," Kharrazi told state television.

"If it (Washington) adopts a new approach to Iran and is ready to interact with us based



Iranian foreign minister Kamal Kharrazi. (Reuters)

on mutual respect and the principle of equality, the atmosphere will change remarkably."

Washington cut ties with Iran shortly after the 1979 Islamic revolution and has labelled it part of an "axis of evil."

Khamenei said US aid for Bam, which included waiving some banking restrictions to speed the flow of donations, "does not mean that the long-standing, continuous, deep and rooted enmity of the arrogant American regime towards the Iranian nation will be forgotten."

Khamenei's comments reflected the long-standing split between Iran's reformers and hardliners on how to deal with the superpower the conservatives call the "Great Satan."

In his speech, broadcast on state television, Khamenei said Washington had used the Bam quake as "an opportunity... to pursue their political goals."

"They hide their iron fist in a silk glove," he said.

Khamenei frequently undercuts efforts by reformist officials to improve ties with Washington and in the past has even forbid-

den any talk in Iran about restoring ties with the US, arguing it would be a betrayal of the Islamic revolution.

Unlike the EU, which has held a policy of "critical engagement" with Iran for the last few years, Washington has largely shunned Iranian officials.

But Kharrazi said Iran's negotiations with Britain, France and Germany, which led to Tehran's agreement last October to cooperate fully with UN inspectors, was a better approach.

"Our recent experience with Europe on the nuclear issue proved that problems can be solved by negotiation," he said.

While adopting a softer tone in recent days both Tehran and Washington have set pre-conditions for improving relations.

Washington wants Tehran to hand over detained al Qaida suspects, abandon its nuclear programme and stop backing Palestinian militant groups that attack Israel.

Iran has called on Washington to lift economic sanctions imposed in 1995, which among other things prevent US companies from investing in Opec's second largest oil producer or trading in Iranian oil.

Tehran also wants Washington to hand over members of the armed Iranian Opposition group the People's Mujahideen being held by US forces in Iraq and to abandon efforts to weaken Iran's clerical leadership.

THE TELEGRAPH

9 JAN 2004

9 JAN 2004

Kurds to get special status in Iraq

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The Guardian & Reuters
Washington, January 5

THE BUSH Administration has decided to let the Kurdish region remain semi-autonomous as part of a newly sovereign Iraq despite warnings from Iraq's neighbours, particularly Syria, and many Iraqis not to divide the country into ethnic states, American and Iraqi officials say.

The officials said their new position on the Kurdish area was effectively dictated by the November 15 accord with Iraqi leaders that established June 30 as the target date for Iraqi self-rule. Such a rapid timetable, they said,

has left no time to change the autonomy and unity of the Kurdish stronghold of the north. "Once we struck the November 15 deal, there's a realisation that it was best not to touch too heavily on the status quo," said an official.

The issue of whether Iraq is to be divided into ethnic states in a federation-style government is of great significance both inside the country and in West Asia, where fears are widespread that dividing Iraq along ethnic or sectarian lines could eventually break the country up and spread turmoil.

Officials insist that leaving the Kurdish autonomous

region intact does not preclude Iraq's consolidating itself without ethnic states in the future when Baghdad writes its own constitution.

But after June 30, if all goes according to plan, the US will be exerting such pressure not as an occupier but as a friendly outside power that happens to have 100,000 troops on the ground. Many experts fear that once a Kurdish government is formalised even temporarily, it will be hard to dislodge.

Some experts have suggested that Iraq should be divided into a Kurdish enclave in the north, a Sunni one in the centre and a Shia one in

the south. But this idea has little support at the Governing Council and none with the US. "You know what the largest Kurdish city in Iraq is?" said an Iraqi official. "It's Baghdad. It isn't like you could draw a line in Iraq and say the Kurds live here or Assyrians, Chaldeans, or Turkmans or Shias or Sunnis live there. In the Shia south, there are a million Sunnis in Basra alone."

Straw on UK troops

British troops will stay in Iraq for at least three or four more years, foreign secretary Jack Straw told BBC.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES
6 JAN 2004
6 JAN 2004

Iran rejects US help for victims

Agence France Presse

WASHINGTON, Jan. 2. — Iran has rejected a US proposal to send a high-level humanitarian delegation to its "axis of evil" foe in the tragic aftermath of the Bam earthquake, the State Department said.

"We have heard back from the Iranians, that given the current situation in Bam and all that is going on there now, it would be preferable to hold such a visit in abeyance," said US state department deputy spokesman Adam Ereli. "Therefore we are not pursuing this further at the moment."

Ereli said that the USA had approached Iran on the subject of the visit after Teheran accepted one US aid shipment to victims of the quake which killed 30,000 people to demonstrate "compassion for the Iranian people". Any talk of a future mission once the situation in Bam had eased would be "speculation," he said.

Right feelers from US, feels Rafsanjani

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Agence France Presse

BAM, Jan. 1. — Influential former Iranian President Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani said here today that the USA had been sending positive signals over its relations with Islamic republic for several months.

He was speaking after Washington announced that it was temporarily lifting some of the sanctions imposed on Iran for more than 20 years to enable Americans to send cash and relief aid to the Iranian city of Bam following Friday's massive earthquake that killed tens of thousands.

"We must look at it more closely, but they are in the process of sending positive signals for several months now," Mr Rafsanjani said at Bam airport.

He singled out yesterday's announcement by the USA that it was suspending for 90 days for humanitarian reasons some of its restrictions on contacts with Iran.

Car bomb rings in 2004

8 die in midnight blast outside Baghdad restaurant

Reuters
Baghdad, January 1

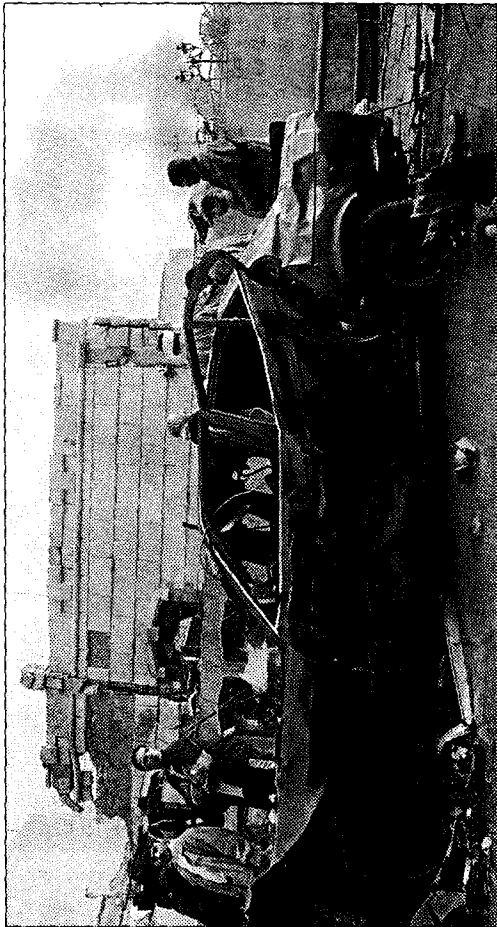
THE STREETS of Baghdad were mostly deserted at midnight on Wednesday as Iraqis celebrated the New Year hurried home after a car bomb at one of the city's most popular restaurants killed eight people and injured at least 30.

Many in Iraq — a land where the New Year was first celebrated 4,000 years ago — had hoped for a joyous start to 2004, marking an end to a traumatic year in which the country was invaded by US-led forces and Saddam Hussein was ousted from power.

The evening had begun promisingly. Baghdad's few liquor stores were doing roaring business as night fell; people carting away beer and whisky by the crate.

Some people burst crackers outside their homes, and on streets in the city centre young men danced in front of cars, cheering.

But the sound of the car bomb, which reverberated through central Baghdad just over two hours before midnight, put a swift end to the revelling.



Onlookers gather outside the damaged Nabil restaurant in Baghdad on Thursday, where a car bomb exploded, killing eight and wounding 30, during a New Year Eve's party.

US-led forces had warned of bomb attacks by anti-coalition guerrillas at places where Westerners gathered. The Nabil restaurant, however, was an unlikely choice, being mostly frequented by wealthy Iraqis, although three correspondents of the *Los Angeles Times* were dining there at the time of the blast and were wounded. Four local staff members were also wounded.

The dead were all Iraqis, among several families who had gathered for a New Year's Eve meal.

There was little celebration among the 150,000 coalition troops in the country. Many were on patrol to guard against attacks.

Brig.-Gen. M Dempsey, commander of the 1st Armoured Division, responsible

for the capital, said his troops would be on high alert for potential attacks over the next few days after a series of assaults since Christmas Day. "We always take a posture of extra vigilance on key dates in the calendar."

In the northern town of Tikrit, Saddam's hometown, US troops planned to light the night sky by firing mortar flares at midnight.

The story of Concorde's birth pangs

SECRET CABINET papers published on Thursday revealed the fiasco surrounding the building of the Anglo-French supersonic Concorde jetliner 30 years ago.

It was so beset with delays and bad management that government leaders were concerned France would pull out because of British "incompetence and defeatism" and prevent future sales.

The papers showed Britain was concerned about French reaction to the project, which the two countries had started jointly 11 years earlier. French Prime Minister Pierre Messmer had sent a special envoy, Adm. Rene Bloch, to London to try to straighten the programme.

In a memorandum to then British PM Edward Heath, an industry ministry official wrote that Bloch had said "Messmer called him to say the project is in a mess".

Bloch was "critical of the entire management structure, both official and industrial". The department said the reason for this was "a lack of firm orders and a consequent belief by the workers that their jobs are at risk, causing them to spin out the work."

AFF, London