

Baghdad 'house bomb' kills 28 during police raids

ALASTAIR MACDONALD
BAGHDAD, DECEMBER 29

A POWERFUL blast destroyed a house in western Baghdad during an overnight police raid, flattening several nearby buildings and killing at least 28 people, including seven policemen, police said on Wednesday.

They said the house was raided as a suspected base for foreign militants. As police burst in, a blast tore through the building. Five nearby houses were also destroyed.

"The house was turned into a bomb," a police source said.

There was some doubt, police sources said, on whether the tip that brought officers to the house was genuine; people inside may have blown themselves up rather than face capture—but it was also possible police were lured into a booby trap.

The incident happened late on Tuesday, a day that had already seen about two dozen police and other Iraqi security force personnel killed in other attacks by insurgents who appear bent on wrecking next month's US-sponsored election.



An Iraqi youth walks past the crater caused by the overnight blast (above). A man watches as an oil pipeline fire burns in northern town of Baiji. Saboteurs struck the domestic pipeline on Wednesday. *Reuters*



By dawn, US and Iraqi troops had sealed off the site and were scouring through heaps of rubble, which were all that was left of the houses. Some locals said they believed the house had been used by foreign Arab fighters. A US Military spokesman said he had no information.

Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, a Jordanian Islamist believed to have allied with nationalist Sunni Arab supporters of Saddam Hussein, for the first time won the public backing of Osama bin Laden as Al Qaeda's leader in Iraq in an audiotape broadcast this week.

Zarqawi claimed responsibility for a suicide car bomb attack on the headquarters of a major Shiite Muslim party in

Baghdad on Monday, which killed at least nine people but missed SCIRI party leader Abdul Aziz al-Hakim. Washington has put a \$25 million price on Zarqawi's head who, US commanders say, may have fled Falluja before the US assault on the city.

Meanwhile, insurgents clashed with the US and Iraqi forces in the centre of the northern town of Samarra on Wednesday, witnesses said.

US Helicopters circled above and the sound of gunfire could be heard. Shops were shut and the area was deserted. A US Military spokesman said two patrols came under fire, adding there were no US casualties and the clashes were over.

A roadside bomb explosion wounded a US soldier and five Iraqi police officers in Samarra on Tuesday night, he said.

Meanwhile, an Iraqi National Guardsman was also killed on Wednesday in the Siniya area, West of Samarra. The eight-member Siniya village council resigned on Tuesday following the assassination of its President. Around 110 guards resigned after their Siniya commander was killed in a car bomb explosion along with several Guards two weeks ago. *Reuters*

Saudi police capture 2, kill 3 militants in shootout

JEDDAH: Saudi security forces captured two wanted militants after a gun battle in the Red Sea city of Jeddah, security sources said on Wednesday.

It was not clear if the militants were on the list of 26 most wanted militants linked to Al Qaeda, which has been waging a campaign of attacks in the kingdom.

Saudi police killed three militants in a shootout in the capital Riyadh, security sources said on Tuesday. Earlier this month, Al Qaeda militants stormed the US consulate in Jeddah, killing five non-American staff in the first attack on a Western mission in Saudi. In a purported audio tape, Osama bin Laden praised the attack, in which four militants were also killed, and called for strikes on oil facilities in the kingdom, the world's biggest crude exporter. The oil-rich kingdom has been rocked by a surge of Islamic militant violence since May 2003, in which about 170 people have been killed, including Westerners. — *Reuters*

28 killed in Iraq trap

103 23/12

Baghdad, Dec. 29 (Reuters): At least 28 people were killed in Baghdad overnight when insurgents blew up a house that police were raiding, flattening neighbouring homes.

The police were lured into a trap, the interior ministry said. But neighbours said officers responded to a genuine call.

Six policemen were among the 28 dead and four officers were missing, an interior ministry spokesman said. Witnesses saw at least one more dead woman dug from the rubble of at least three houses turned into a wasteland of rubble by the massive blast. Attacks this week on police and other Iraqi security forces have left dozens dead in a sign the Sunni insurgency, freshly endorsed by Osama bin Laden, remains a potent force despite US offensives intended to protect next month's Iraqi elections.

There were renewed clashes in the Sunni city of Samarra. A US assault there three months ago was meant to quell revolt before the January 30 vote, which should hand power to the Shia majority after years of oppression under Saddam Hussein.

In Mosul, US jets screamed low overhead during sustained gunfire and explosions in the west of Iraq's third city. US troops are hunting suspects after a suicide bomber killed 21 people, mostly Americans, in a US army mess tent a week ago.

Four men in uniforms of the police and National Guard were found dead in Yusufiya,

by Al-Naqi

south of Baghdad. One had been shot, the others beheaded in an intimidatory display of the kind typically claimed by the likes of Jordanian Islamist Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, who have allied with Sunni nationalist Saddam loyalists.

A further 21 people were wounded in the Baghdad blast, late yesterday in the capital's western Ghazaliya district. Police had responded to a call from a neighbour, the ministry spokesman said: "When the police arrived and went in, the house blew up. It seems to have been a trap."

However, it was not clear that police had been deliberately lured to the house. Neighbours said it was they who called them after becoming suspicious of a dark-skinned man in the house, which they said had been rented this week and filled with boxes. "The house was turned into a bomb," a police officer said.

Some three quarters of a tonne of explosive may have gone off, the US military said.

Three houses were entirely destroyed, razed to piles of bricks and rubble, while half a dozen others were damaged. Entire families were wiped out, said neighbours who believed foreign fighters have rented the house raided by police.

"I saw unexploded artillery shells with red wires taken out of the rubble," said neighbour Mohammed Ali, 35, a taxi driver, who said he saw police storm the house moments before the blast.

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THE TELEGRAPH

Osama in poll boycott call

Dubai, Dec. 27 (Reuters): An audio tape purportedly from al Qaida leader Osama bin Laden has urged Iraqis to boycott January parliamentary elections, Arabic Al Jazeera television said today.

Shortly before airing the tape, the television said bin Laden backed Abu Musab al-Zarqawi as the Islamist network's leader in Iraq.

Earlier this month, an audio tape purportedly from bin Laden urged militants to concentrate their attacks on Iraqi and Gulf oil facilities, saying it was the most powerful weapon against America.

After that tape was posted on the Internet, an intelligence official in Washington said an analysis had determined with "high confidence" that the tape contained the voice of bin Laden.

In Baghdad, a suicide car bomber hit one of the biggest Shia parties running in elections next month, killing 13 people but missing its leader — hours before the most prominent Sunni party withdrew from the historic poll.

The bomb exploded outside the Baghdad head office of the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI), a party set up in exile in Iran to oppose Saddam Hussein and one of the strongest groups contesting the January 30 election.

Later today, in a move repeatedly hinted at in recent weeks, the Iraqi Islamic Party, a leading force among the Sunni minority, said it was withdrawing from the poll because violence in Sunni areas

meant it would not be free or fair.

"We are withdrawing," party leader Mohsen Abdel Hamid said. "We are not calling for a boycott, but we said we would take part only if certain conditions had been met and they have not," he said.

Victims of the bombing, in which police said about 50 people were wounded, included several receptionists and guards at SCIRI's headquarters.

The office is also home to party leader Abdul Aziz al-Hakim, who was there at the time. He called it an assassination attempt but said SCIRI's thousands-strong militia would not retaliate. "We have chosen the path of non-violence and we will stick to it," he said. "The only ideology these people know is terror. We laid down our arms in favour of pluralism. If we wanted violence we would have responded a long time ago."

28 DEC 2004

THE TELEGRAPH

27 DEC 2004

Iraq rejects US talk of bolstering Sunni votes

LUKE BAKER
BAGHDAD, DECEMBER 26

IRAQ'S Electoral Commission on Sunday dismissed suggestions from Washington that minority Sunni Arabs could get extra seats in Parliament, after next month's election, to avoid Shiite domination if Sunnis fail to vote.

The *New York Times* said the US was exploring such a possibility to avoid the marginalisation of Sunni Arabs, who make up about 20 per cent of Iraq's population and were dominant under Saddam Hussein. Violence in Sunni areas could mean many there do not vote in the January 30 poll.

"This is the first time I am hearing of this. It hasn't been discussed before at all," said Farid Ayar, a member of the Electoral Commission and its spokesman. "It's not realistic."

"It would be in complete contravention of the electoral rules to do such a thing," Ayar said, adding that any US or other interference in the running of the election was unacceptable.

The *New York Times* cited a Western diplomat — apparently a US official — as saying the possibility of granting some top Sunni vote-getters places in the 275-member legislature even if they did not secure seats through the ballot, had been raised with Grand Ayatollah Ali Al-Sistani, the leading Shiite cleric. The *Times* said the White House was also talking to Iraqi leaders about guaranteeing Sunni Arabs a certain number of ministries or high-level jobs in the next Iraqi government if they fail to do well in the election.

The theory is that even some Shiite politicians are concerned that an exaggerated victory could backfire if it locks Sunni Arabs out of power, ex-

SHI'ITE VICTORY COULD BACKFIRE



Flags being made at a centre for the hearing and speaking impaired in Baghdad

acerbating violence in the country, where the insurgency is largely Sunni Arab-led. Shi'ites make up about 60 per cent of the population and are widely expected to come out on top.

The idea of adding Sunnis to the legislature after the election was acknowledged by US officials as likely to be difficult to carry out, but they said it might be necessary to avoid Sunni estrangement, the *Times* said.

in Baghdad declined to comment. Ayar was emphatic in dismissing such a possibility, and suggested US officials were trying to interfere. "Maybe they didn't read the rules and regulations of the Commission.... The Americans are expressing their views and those aren't always the same as the Commission's.... It is not acceptable for anyone to interfere in our business. That will not be allowed to happen. Who wins, wins," said Ayar.

Leading Sunni Arab politicians have called for a delay of up to six months in the poll, arguing that violence concentrated mostly in Sunni areas means voters will not be able to go to the polls and it will not be free or fair.

While they are calling for a delay, dozens of Sunni religious and secular parties and coalitions have registered to stand in the election, now just five weeks away.

—Reuters

Bloody Christmas for Baghdad

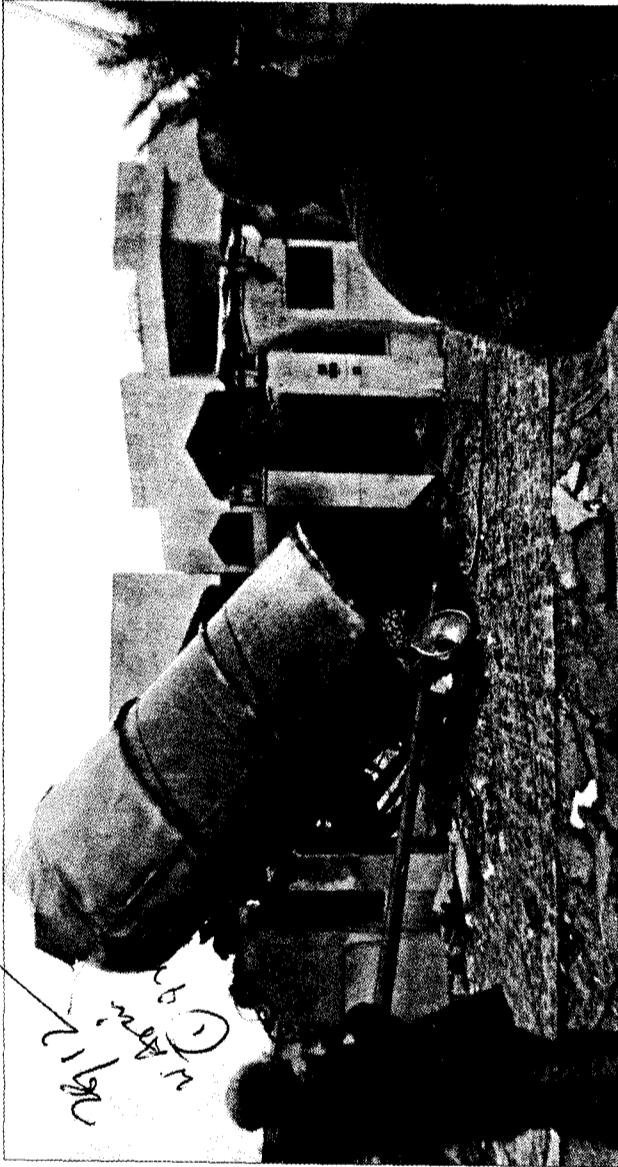
ASSOCIATED PRESS

BAGHDAD, Dec. 25. — Nine people were killed and 14 seriously wounded in gas tanker explosion in west Baghdad that occurred just hours after US defence secretary Mr Donald H. Rumsfeld left the capital following a surprise visit, police said today.

Initially, police and hospital sources said two died in yesterday night's explosion of the butane truck that was wired with explosives. It blew up in the upscale Mansour district which houses foreign missions and is home to top Iraqi government officials.

Police spokesman Lt.-Col. Raed Abbas said seven more bodies were pulled today from underneath the rubble of one of the three houses destroyed in the blast. In the nearby al-Yarmouk Hospital, several of the injured with burn blisters on their blackened faces and limbs cried and shivered in pain.

Abdel Imam, who witnessed the blast, told reporters that the gas truck drove at high



The cistern of an oil tanker after it landed on the entrance of the Libyan Embassy following an explosion in Baghdad on Saturday. — AFP

speed into the Mansour districts with lights turned off moments before its driver triggered the detonation. He said that "a whole family" perished

casualties, Capt. Brian Lucas, a US military spokesman in Baghdad, said. There were no injuries inside the embassies.

Mr Rumsfeld's surprise one-day tour in Iraq took him to the

cities of Mosul, Fallujah and Tikrit and the heavily barricaded Green Zone in Baghdad. He did not visit the Mansour area, and throughout his meetings with US troops, he insisted that the insurgency that has plagued the country for months would be defeated.

Meanwhile, Wijdan Al-Khuzai, a female member of Iraq's interim National Assembly was found dead after being kidnapped three days ago, medic Sabah Aboud of the al-Yarmouk hospital said.

Turkish hostages on TV

Video footage aired today on Turkish television showed a well-known Turkish ship owner saying he and another man were being held hostage in Iraq, another report adds from Ankara (Turkey). Kahraman Sadikoglu and ship captain Ahmet Yurtdas are believed to have been kidnapped on 16 December after leaving the southern Iraqi city of Basra. The footage was aired on NTV television.

Mosul bomber was wearing Iraqi uniform

Associated Press
Baghdad, December 24

The suicide bomber believed to have blown himself up in a US military dining tent near Mosul this week, killing more than 20 people, was probably wearing an Iraqi military uniform, the US military said on Thursday.

The top US general in northern Iraq acknowledged that the bomber may have gotten through the vetting process conducted by US and Iraqi authorities to check the backgrounds of Iraqis joining the security services.

Lt. Col. Paul Hastings, spokesman for Task Force Olympia in Mosul, said a general officer will be flying in from headquarters in Baghdad to take over the investigation into how the attack on the base near Mosul was carried out. The FBI is also participating in the probe. "He'll initiate an investigation ... then we will be in a better position to find out what happened," Hastings said.

The Ansar al-Sunnah Army, the military group that earlier claimed responsibility for the attack, issued a new statement reiterating that it was a suicide bombing. "God enabled one of your martyr brothers to plunge into God's enemies inside their forts, killing and injuring hundreds," the group said in a statement posted on its website on Thursday. "We don't know how they can be so stupid that until now they have not figured out the type of the strike that hit them."

The blast on Tuesday was the deadliest single attack on a US base, hitting the dining tent at lunchtime and killing 13 US servicemembers, five American civilians, three Iraqi National Guard members, and one "unidentified non-US person". Military officials have said it's not

yet known whether that final death was the suicide bomber.

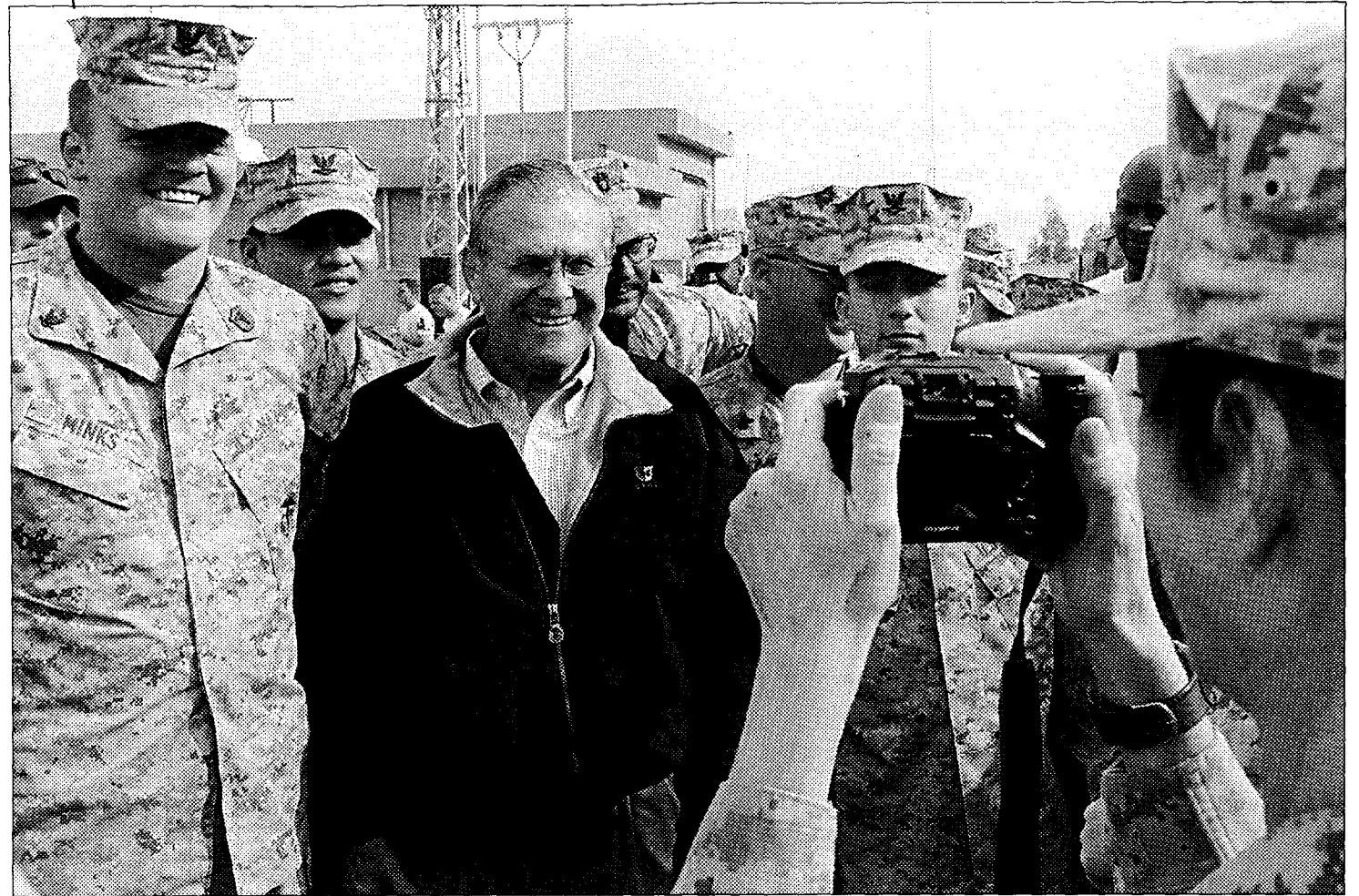
"From preliminary indications of the damage it looks like the guy (the suicide bomber) was wearing an Iraqi military uniform," Hastings said, adding that it seemed like a "vest-type of explosive".

Investigators had still not determined whether the attacker was working on the base or whether he had managed to infiltrate it, Hastings said.

Members of the Iraqi interim government's fledgling security forces routinely operate with US troops in operations against the insurgents. Until now, there have been no reports of serious tensions between the two. Iraqi government officials said they knew nothing of the report that bomber may have been wearing a uniform. "This was an American declaration, we don't know any thing about it, they did not contact us," said Salih Sarhan, a spokesman for the Iraqi Defence Ministry.

Brig. Gen. Carter F Ham — commander of Task Force Olympia, the main US force in northern Iraq — also reported the bomber was likely wearing an Iraqi uniform and said the attacker may have gotten through the vetting process run by US and Iraqi authorities. "The vetting process I think is sound, but clearly we have now at least one instance where that was likely not satisfactory. So we have to redouble our efforts there," he said.

Ham said the bomber likely had help, though he did not say whether it was known if the bomber had accomplices in the camp. "It is very difficult to conceive that this would be the act of a lone individual. It is reasonable to assume that this was a mission perhaps sometime in the planning," he said.



US Marines get themselves photographed with Secretary of Defence Donald Rumsfeld during his visit to a military camp near Fallujah on Friday. REUTERS

DEFENCE SECRETARY Donald Rumsfeld paid a surprise Christmas visit on Friday to the troops in Mosul, scene of the deadliest attack on Americans since last year's war to oust Saddam Hussein. Rumsfeld, who flew in amid great secrecy, visited staff and patients in a hospital at the US base where a suicide bomber infiltrated on Tuesday and killed 22 people, including 14 US military personnel and four American contractors

RUMSFELD ACKNOWLEDGED the situation in Iraq was difficult and that it looked bleak to some, but said the guerrillas would be beaten and stressed the need to work with, and hand over charge to, Iraqi forces. "There is no doubt in my mind this is achievable," Rumsfeld said of the prospects of victory. "I am deeply grateful to all of you. I respect you. I wish you all a merry Christmas," the Defence Secretary told the troops

HE LATER flew to Tikrit, Saddam's home town, where he was received with loud applause at another of the fallen dictator's former palaces. He told them much depended on recruiting and training Iraqi security forces. Rumsfeld acknowledged a deterioration in the security situation in Mosul may have been caused by the infiltration of guerrillas escaping US forces who stormed Fallujah last month

Mayhem at US Mosul base

Americans' support for war slips

MORE AMERICANS than ever, some 56 per cent, say the war in Iraq is not worth fighting, according to a new poll.

Some 57 per cent of those surveyed disapproved of President George W. Bush's handling of the situation, just one point lower than his rating at the height of the Abu Ghraib prisoner abuse scandal, the ABC News/Washington Post poll found on Monday.

Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld's approval rating was only 35 per cent — half of where it stood when Baghdad fell — and 52 per cent said Bush should sack him. His approval rating has dropped from 71 per cent in April 2003, when Iraqi president Saddam Hussein was toppled, to 41 per cent in the new poll.

Despite mounting criticism from US lawmakers, including fellow Republicans, President George W. Bush defended Rumsfeld on Monday, saying the Pentagon chief was doing "a really fine job" and would stay on.

Bush undertook a cabinet shake-up after his November 2 re-election, but he decided to keep Rumsfeld in his administration for his second term. The President's popularity has also fallen, from 55 per cent in November to 49 per cent now, according to the poll. "Bush is the first incumbent President to have an approval rating below 50 per cent one month after winning re-election," CNN said.

Americans also doubted Iraq's elections planned for January 30, with 58 per cent saying the country is not ready and 54 per cent said the polls would not be honest and fair.

AFP, Washington



Workers and soldiers tend to the wounded after a mortar attack on a dining facility at a US camp during lunchtime in Mosul on Tuesday.

Attack on camp mess kills 22 as Blair visits Iraq

Reuters
Mosul, December 21

IN ONE of the most deadly attacks on American forces since last year's invasion, a mortar and rocket attack on a US military base in Mosul killed at least 22 people and wounded more than 50 on Tuesday.

The Mosul attack comes on a day when British Prime Minister Tony Blair made a surprise visit to Baghdad, where he vowed that the war against insurgents would be won and that elections scheduled

for January 30 would happen on time despite an upsurge in bloodshed.

Iraqi militant group Ansar al-Sunna, a major player in the rebellion against the US-backed government and security forces, has claimed responsibility for the attack. A defence official in Washington said it was not clear how many of the casualties were Americans. "There were an unknown number of rounds in the rocket and mortar attack. We don't know the breakdown. We don't know if it's US, Iraqi

or a combination."

Militants attacked at noon when many soldiers at the forward operating base, Marez, were eating lunch. US military camps in Mosul have tented mess halls seating hundreds of troops.

In the bloodiest single incident for US troops in Iraq, two Black Hawks crashed in Mosul in November last year, killing 17 soldiers. At the start of the war in March last year, 29 soldiers were killed in a fierce day of fighting.

Blair, who has visited Iraq twice but never Bagh-

dad, flew to meet Iraqi Prime Minister Iyad Allawi in the city's fortified government Green Zone under tight security. Mortar rounds, aimed daily at the compound, shook the ground soon after he left.

He hailed Iraq's election workers as "heroes". Blair's trip comes months before he is expected to call an election that will test his popularity after the decision to go to war in Iraq, a move that has grown ever more unpopular with the British public.

Before the cameras, the

British PM launched a passionate defence of the war as vital for Britain's security and Iraqis' freedom. "Here are people who are risking their lives every day in order to make sure that the people of Iraq get a chance to decide their own destiny," he told a news conference after meeting Election Commission chiefs.

Blair said he had no doubt Britain was right to have helped oust Saddam and described the fight against Iraq's insurgents as a war between right and wrong. "Whatever people

felt about the original conflict, we the British aren't a nation of quitters," he said. "What's very obvious to me is that the Iraqi people here are not going to quit on this task either. They're going to see it through," he said.

Both Blair and Allawi were at pains to portray the fight against insurgents in Iraq, most of whom are loyalists to the former regime or Sunni Muslim militants, as part of the US administration's war on terrorism launched after September 11.

Iraq detains 50 over Najaf suicide blast

Governor bans cars from city centre to prevent attacks ■ Explosion death toll rises to 66

Associated Press
Najaf, December 20

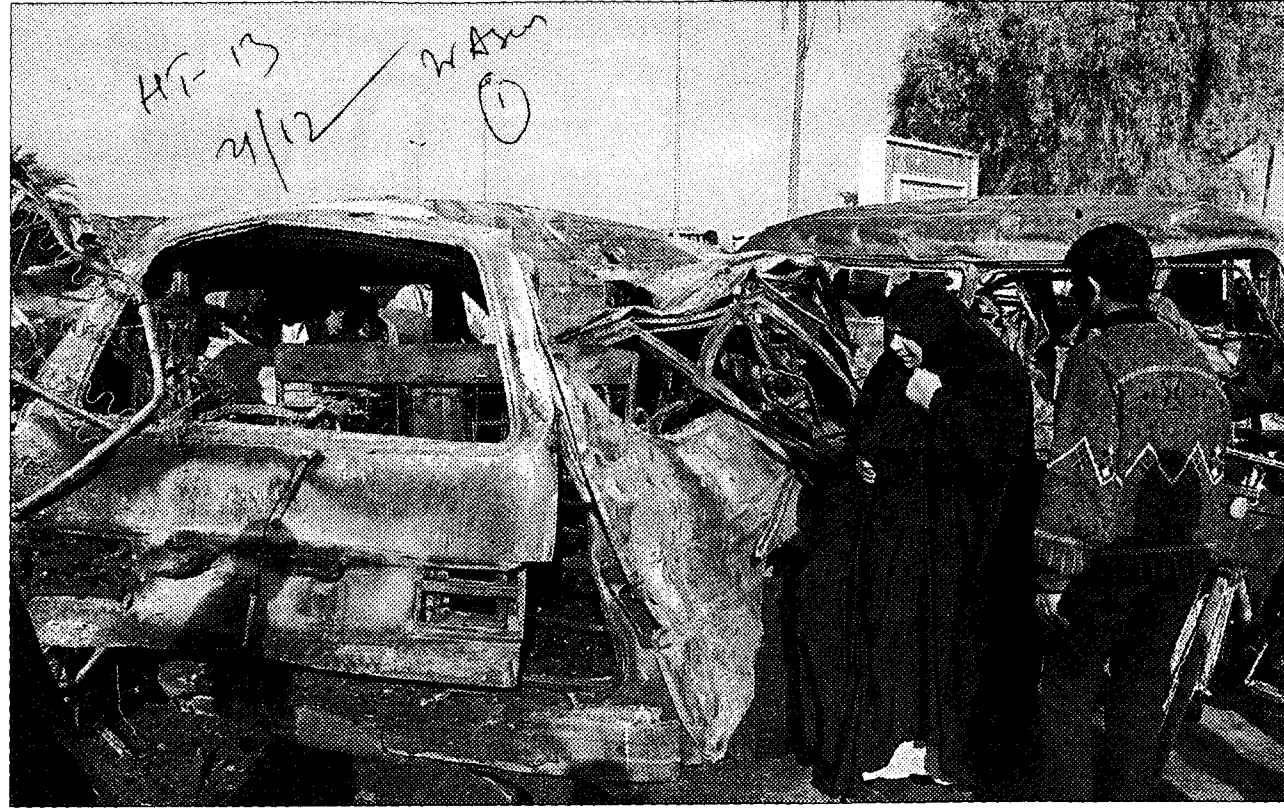
AUTHORITIES HAVE detained 50 suspects in connection with explosion in the Shia holy city of Najaf, and have banned cars from entering the downtown area to prevent future car bombings, Governor Adnan al-Zurufi said on Monday.

Thousands of mourners attended funerals on Monday of the victims of the Najaf blast that killed at least 54 people and wounded 142. On Sunday, car bombs tore through a Najaf funeral procession and a main bus station in the nearby Shia city of Karbala, where at least 13 people were killed and 33 were wounded.

The deadliest attacks in Iraq since July were a bloody reminder that the Shia heartland in the south — and not just the Sunni regions of central and northern Iraq — is vulnerable to the mainly Sunni insurgents aiming to wreck the country's key elections scheduled for January 30.

Meanwhile, the head of the national electoral commission appealed to security forces to safeguard election officials after three were shot to death in a brazen attack on Sunday by dozens of guerrillas operating openly in the heart of Baghdad. The ambush was the latest attack to target Iraqi officials working to organise the vote.

"We send an appeal to the



People on Monday check vehicles destroyed by Sunday's suicide bomb blast outside Karbala's main bus station.

Iraqi government and all the people to protect our employees," Abdul Hussein Al-Hindawi said. "We have no real protection because we work everywhere in the country and have more than 6,000 employees."

"Fifty people, some of them from Najaf and others from outside, have been de-

tained. One person detained this morning is a citizen of an Arab country. They are all being interrogated," al-Zurufi said after taking part in a funeral procession attended by thousands of residents.

Asked if Sunday's attack had targeted Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, who lives several hundred yards from

the site of the blast, al-Zurufi said, "We have had information for a long time that his eminence, Ayatollah al-Sistani, is a possible target but we are taking all measures to protect him."

Al-Sistani has declared that voting in the elections is a religious duty for all Shias. The deadly strikes Sunday

highlighted the apparent ability of the insurgents to launch attacks almost at will, despite confident assessments by US military commanders that they had regained the initiative after last month's campaign against militants in Fallujah.

Shias, who make up around 60 per cent of Iraq's

Saddam urges Iraqis to unite

FROM HIS prison cell, ousted Iraqi President Saddam Hussein urged his compatriots to remain united against the US occupation and warned of the potential dangers of the upcoming elections, his lawyers said.

Iraqi lawyer Khalil al-Duleimi met for more than four hours with Saddam on Thursday, the first meeting Saddam had with legal counsel since he was captured a year ago. Al-Duleimi, who came to Jordan to brief the legal team on his meeting, did not speak to reporters before he returned to Iraq Sunday.

"Our representative in Iraq told us that the president warned the people of Iraq and the Arabs to be aware of the American scheme aimed at splitting Iraq into sectarian and religious divisions and weakening the (Arab) na-

tion," said Bushra Khalil, a Lebanese member of the defence team.

"The President sent recommendations to the Iraqi people to remain united and not fall in the trap of America's slogans," she said on Sunday. "He said Kurds, Arabs, Shiites, Sunnis and Christians are all Iraqis who all have to stand united against the American plot."

The statement could be construed as an attempt by Saddam to fuel further rebellion among Iraqis. Ziad al-Khasawneh, who heads Saddam's legal team, said that the lawyers had "passed on a message from Iraq's leader to his people and he has all the right to address his subjects in any way he sees fit". The legal team includes 20 lead lawyers and 1,500 volunteers.

AP, Baghdad

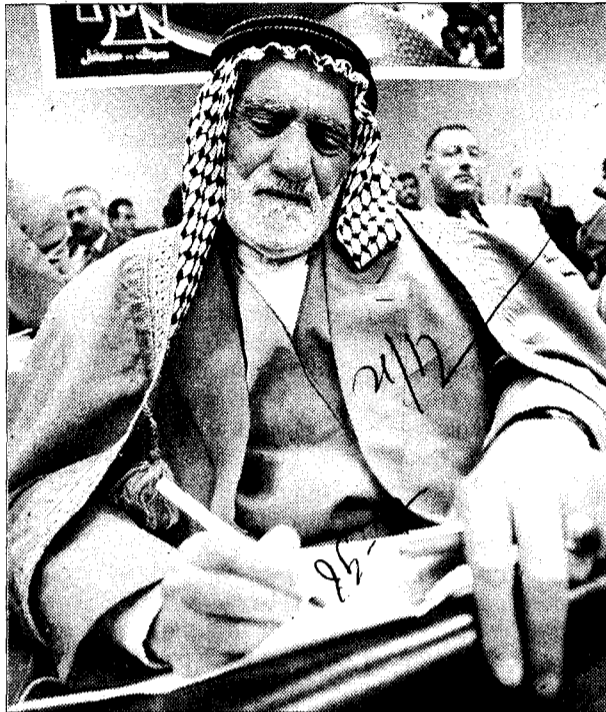
population, have been strong supporters of the polls, which they expect will reverse the longtime domination of Iraq by the Sunni Arab minority. The insurgency is believed to include many Sunnis who have lost prestige and privilege since Saddam Hussein's fall.

Also on Monday, a roadside bomb planted near

Baghdad's airport destroyed a US Army Humvee, the military said. One of the soldiers was wounded.

And US troops detained 19 suspected insurgents on Monday during a series of raids in the village of Siwash near Tikrit. The soldiers confiscated AK-47 assault rifles and a machine gun during the raids, the military said.

Iraq's crucial election ballot down to lottery



A tribal leader takes notes during the lottery for order of parties on the ballot paper for the Iraq elections. Reuters

LIN NOUEIHED

BAGHDAD, DECEMBER 20

SPINNING a big perspex drum filled with balls, not unlike a national lottery, Iraq's Electoral Commission determined on Monday where competing parties will rank on the ballot paper for the January 30 election.

More than 200 parties, blocs and individuals have signed up to contest the poll—around 7,700 candidates in all—and the order they appear on the ballot sheet, which could be many pages thick, will be determined by chance.

United Nations envoy to Iraq, Ashraf Qazi, pulled the first balls from the drum, as hundreds of candidates looked on expectantly, in a process designed for maximum transparency in the country's first democratic election in nearly 50 years.

"Today is a great day in the history of your great nation," Qazi told a crowd gathered in a room at a conference centre that used to be part of Saddam Hussein's presidential complex.

"It is truly in the interests of every Iraqi citizen, whatever their political views, to participate in this electoral process. It is the only way forward."

Iraq is being treated as a single electoral district. Registered voters will choose either an individual, party or coalition list of candidates, and seats in the 275-seat national Assembly will be distributed by proportional representation.

The system, chosen with United Nations help, is designed to encourage the formation of alliances and coalitions that try to appeal across Iraq's spread of ethnic and religious groups. Since the electorate is inexperienced when it comes to democratic elections, the order in which names appear on the ballot may have some influence on voting patterns.

If around 10 million people end up voting, braving what is expected to be intense intimidation from insurgents not to do so, it would require around 36,000 votes to win one seat.

Voters will also be electing candidates to councils in Iraq's 18 governorates, and in the largely Kurdish north, they will elect a regional government, meaning the ballot papers will be even thicker.

There are expected to be between 6,000 and 9,000 voting stations. Iraqi security forces will be in charge of protecting the stations, while monitors will look out for voter fraud. —Reuters

Iraq poll campaign begins amid violence

By Atul Aneja

MANAMA, DEC. 15. Iraqi political parties contesting the January 30 elections for a 275-member Assembly can begin campaigning from today amid violence, which has engulfed large parts of the country.

The Assembly will appoint a government and draft a constitution leading to a national election in 2006. More than 230 parties and groups, organised around 80 alliances, are expected to participate in the polls.

While the majority Shia community has made extensive preparations to contest, Sunnis, who have been in power during most of the country's history, appear disinclined.

The Association of Muslim Scholar (AMS), an influential but a predominantly Sunni body, has opposed the polls. But the Sunni, Iraqi Islamic Party, could contest though it has demanded that the elections be postponed by six months.

It has presented a list of 275

candidates to the Electoral Commission, but its spokesman has said a decision on participation is yet to be taken.

"If elections are not postponed, we will reconsider our stance of taking part," Fuad al-Rawi was quoted as saying.

At least 17 Sunni and secular parties, including one led by Sunni elder statesman Adnan Pachachi, a former Foreign Minister, have supported a delay, saying voters in Sunni regions would be too intimidated to vote.

Al-Sistani's edict

Amid the 60 per cent Shia majority's anticipation of coming to power for the first time, the top Shia spiritual leader, Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, has issued an edict calling upon Shias to vote.

His followers have unveiled a list of 228 candidates that draws together the two main Shia parties, Dawa and the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI), as well as the Iraqi Hizbollah.

But Moqtada Al-Sadr, prominent Shia cleric, on Tuesday demanded that religious leaders should seek guarantees for the immediate departure of foreign troops after the elections. "Otherwise, our participation will be unlikely."

Trial next week

The interim Prime Minister, Iyad Allawi, has said leaders in the former President, Saddam Hussein's regime would face trial for crimes against humanity and war crimes next week. He said the 'symbols' of the former regime would be tried "one by one." The first to appear would be Ali Hassan al-Majid — who has been accused of involvement in a chemical weapon attack against Kurdish residents of Halabja. The interim Defence Minister, Hazim al-Shalaan, said the trial would begin "next week, maybe, or in the middle of next month." There has so far been no indication about when Mr. Hussein would himself face trial.

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THE HINDU

Allawi joins poll race

Associated Press

BAGHDAD, Dec. 15. — Campaigning for Iraq's first national elections since Saddam Hussein's ouster began today under the shadow of a rampant insurgency, with the nation's interim leader announcing his candidacy and the defence minister criticising Iran's role in this war-ravaged nation.

Iraqi Prime Minister Mr Ayad Allawi's long-expected decision to join the polls was the highlight of what was a low-key beginning to the campaigning period, which many fear will be targeted by insurgents opposed to the 30 January polls.

Concerns were raised over rising Iranian influence in the political future of Iraq, where the majority Shi'ites are expected to dominate elections scheduled for 30 January.

Defence minister Mr Hazem Shaalan, who has accused Teheran of interfering in Iraq's affairs, said Iranian and Syrian intelligence agents, plus former operatives from Saddam



Iraqi PM Mr Ayad Allawi presents his list of candidates for the 30 January polls in Baghdad on Wednesday. — AFP

Hussein's security forces, are cooperating with Jordanian militant Abu Musab al-Zarqawi "to run criminal operations in Iraq".

Today marked the official opening of the campaign period for the vote and the cutoff day for parties or independents to lodge registrations to stand in the elections. Mr Shaalan is running on a separate list not affiliated with the alliance.

Mr Allawi said he will stand at the polls backed by a 240-member list of candidates meant to highlight his appeal to Iraq's diverse and

'Chemical Ali' first on trial

BAGHDAD, Dec. 15. — Ali Hassan al-Majid, a cousin of Saddam Hussein nicknamed "Chemical Ali" for the gassing of the Kurds, will be the first member of Iraq's ousted leadership to go on trial. "The trials will take place from next week until mid-January, and the first to be tried will be Chemical Ali," Mr Shaalan said. — AFP

sometimes fractious ethnic and religious groups.

Surrounded by women and men clad in tribal garb, clerical turbans and smart suits, Mr Allawi pledged to work for national unity and move away from "religious and ethnic fanaticism". He did not say how many members were on his list.

Mosque blast kills 7

Seven people were killed and 32 injured today when a bomb exploded at the gate to one of Shia Islam's holiest shrines, hospital. The injured included Sheik Abdul Mahdi al-Karbalayee, a representative of Iraq's most influential Shi'ite cleric, Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani.

Chemical Ali first aide of Saddam on trial

ALASTAIR MACDONALD
BAGHDAD, DECEMBER 15

ALI Hassan al-Majid, one of Saddam Hussein's most feared deputies, better known as 'Chemical Ali', will be the first leader of the former regime to be tried for war crimes, Iraq's Defence Minister said on Wednesday.

The trial could begin as early as next week, Defence Minister Hazim al-Shaalan told reporters, and would certainly start by the middle of January—days before Iraq is due to hold its first post-Saddam election.

"In the next few days we will have the trial of Ali Hassan-al-Majid, one of the close followers of Saddam Hussein," Shaalan announced. "He will be the first to be tried."

Majid, who is accused of some of the worst crimes committed during Saddam's decades in power, including the gassing of up to 5,000 Kurds in northern Iraq in the late 1980s, is the only one of Saddam's deputies so far set for trial, Shaalan said.

Iraq's interim Prime Minister Iyad Allawi said on Tues-



Ziad Khasawneh, spokesperson of Saddam Hussein's defence team holds the right of attorney from Saddam's wife and daughters, in Amman on Wednesday. Saddam's defence team said the jailed former leader and his deputies were being denied a fair trial. Reuters

day, trials against Saddam's deputies could begin as soon as next week, an announcement that took Iraq's Justice Ministry and some US officials by surprise. One Iraqi official suggested Allawi's announcement was timed to create publicity ahead of the election, with campaigning for the January 30 poll officially beginning on Wednesday.

"It's a piece of showmanship, to try to show that some-

thing has been achieved before the election," said the senior government official, who asked not to be identified.

Allawi announced his election candidacy on Wednesday.

Questions have been raised about the trials being rushed, with investigators only beginning to sift through the evidence against Saddam and his deputies and Iraq's justice system not yet ready for a major trial, with judges recently appointed. There are also concerns that Saddam and his 11 top lieutenants, all held at a detention facility on the outskirts of Baghdad for the past year, have not had access to lawyers.

Eight of those 11 deputies last week briefly refused to eat in what one of their lawyers described as a "hunger strike" to protest the legality of their detentions and demand more access to the International Committee for the Red Cross.

Most of them have not had access to lawyers over the past year or more in detention. The 12 briefly appeared in court in July this year to be informed of the general charges against them, including war crimes and crimes against humanity.

—Reuters

Iraq on edge ahead of polls

Baghdad, Dec. 9 (Reuters): People laughed as an elderly beggar pretended she was a journalist at the fortified entrance of Baghdad's government compound. Even the usually grim-faced security guards were amused.

But the joke was short lived in a city on edge.

A shot suddenly rang out. Guards whipped out AK-47 rifles and fired as people ran for cover. Panicked voices crackled across walkie-talkies. After several minutes of mayhem the bodyguard of a judge in a car raised his hands. He said he fired his weapon accidentally while fiddling with the clip. Nobody was hurt. Not everyone is so lucky in Baghdad, a city that is bracing for violence ahead of elections scheduled for January 30. Similar incidents have turned bloody in Iraq, where civilians often get caught up in fighting between insurgents and US troops that leaves everybody on edge.

Iraqi election officials were among those who ran for cover after the shooting started outside the compound which houses the Iraqi government and US and British embassies.

Panic gripped the checkpoint, a prime target for insurgents who have mortared and bombed the area before. Tempers flared as onlookers wondered whether a gunfight would break out between security guards waving their weapons around. "That's it. Only the officials will be allowed inside. The bodyguards should stay out here," said the chief guard.

The American security guards were just as nervous. One arrived looking for the man who fired. A US helicopter flew overhead and Bradley fighting vehicles arrived. The only relaxed people were Nepalese private security guards who calmly instructed dogs wearing red vests to sniff beneath cars for bombs. Tension eventually eased but security guards were not taking any chances. They handcuffed the man who accidentally fired his gun and locked him up in a tiny room. His bodyguard colleague offered the chief security man a present wrapped in a plastic bag in a bid to defuse the crisis and release his friend.

But charm works few tricks in Iraq these days.

"Yes I know it's a present," said the guard. "Take it back. Remember the guards don't go inside anymore."

10 DEC 2004 THE TELEGRAPH

Khatami heckled by students over reform

Tehran, Dec. 6 (Reuters): Students, once the backbone of Iran's reformist movement, heckled and harangued President Mohammad Khatami today, accusing him of lacking the courage to deliver promised democratic reforms in the Islamic state.

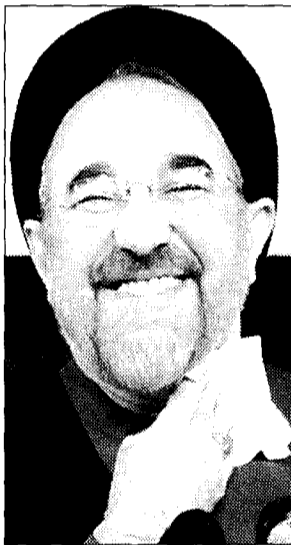
"Khatami, what happened to your promised freedoms?", "Khatami, shame on you", "Students are wise, they detest Khatami", groups shouted as the moderate cleric attempted to address some 1,500 students at Tehran University.

The speech, held to mark Iran's annual Students Day, marked a nadir for Khatami's relations with students who were a major force in his stunning electoral victories of 1997 and 2001.

Now nearing the end of his second and final term, which concludes in mid-2005, Khatami has lost the backing of even some of his most ardent supporters, many of whom feel he failed to stand up to hardliners who have blocked his efforts at reform.

"Unfortunately what Khatami sees as his tolerance, on the contrary was his extreme weakness towards the opponents of democracy," read part of a statement distributed by one pro-reform student group at the meeting.

Khatami, visibly shaken by the students' anger, defended his record and criticised powerful hardliners who have jailed dissidents, closed newspapers and rejected key reform bills.



A student (left) heckles President Mohammad Khatami during a gathering at the University of Tehran. (Reuters)

"My period is going to be over soon but I do not owe anyone," he said. "Those power-seeking fanatics who ignored the people's demands and resisted reforms, they owe me. The ones who destroyed Iran's image in the world, they owe me."

Analysts say Khatami, once seen by the West as a potential leader of change in the Islamic republic, is serving out his final months as a virtual political lame duck.

Conservatives opposed to any watering down of Islamic values and the clerical grip on power are poised to regain the presidency in elections next year after taking control of parliament in a vote in February this year.

At times applauded and at others booed by the boisterous crowd jammed into a lecture theatre, Khatami lashed out with uncharacteristic anger when chants interrupted his speech.

"Just stop it. I will tell them to throw you out," he said. "You are unable to tolerate anything, even words," he

said. Later he said that despite restrictions on free speech in Iran, where over 100 publications have been muzzled in the last four years, the situation was better than in many countries.

"There is no Third World country where the students can talk to their President and criticise the government as you do now." He said he still believed the path of reform would succeed. "I really believe in this system and the (1979 Islamic) revolution and that this system can be developed from within."

But for most present, Khatami's words merely underlined the impotence of a man whom they now view as part of a system unwilling to accept real change.

"Khatami himself is responsible for the problems created in the country," said Zahra, 19, a student of mechanical engineering. "He did not behave properly."

Student leaders, many of whom have been jailed for taking part in pro-democracy protests in recent years, said Khatami had failed to stand by them.

07 DEC 2004

THE TELEGRAPH

07 DEC 2004

THE HINDU

Students heckle Khatami



TEHRAN, Dec. 6. Students, once the backbone of Iran's reformist movement, heckled and harangued the Iranian President, Mohammad Khatami, today, accusing him of lacking the courage to deliver promised democratic reforms in the Islamic state. "Khatami, what happened to your promised freedoms?", "Khatami, shame on you", "Students are wise, they detest Khatami", groups shouted as the moderate cleric attempted to address some 1,500 students at Tehran University.

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"Unfortunately what Khatami sees as his tolerance, on the contrary was his extreme weakness towards the opponents of

An angry student shouts during a speech by the Iranian President, Mohammad Khatami (unseen), at Teheran University on Monday. — AP

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IAEA eyes secret Iran bases

WILLIAM J. BROAD, DAVID E. SANGER & ELAINE SCIOLINO
VIENNA, DECEMBER 2

INTERNATIONAL inspectors are requesting access to two secret Iranian military sites where intelligence suggests that Tehran's Ministry of Defence may be working on atomic weapons, despite the agreement that Iran reached this week to suspend its production of enriched uranium, according to diplomats here.

The inspectors at the International Atomic Energy Agency base their suspicions on a mix of satellite photographs indicating the testing of high explosives, and procurement records showing the purchase of equipment that can be used for enriching uranium, the diplomats said. Both are critical steps in the development of nuclear arms.

Iran has insisted its uranium enrichment programme is entirely for civilian nuclear energy production, but the areas



We are following every credible piece of information:

IAEA CHIEF
ELBARADEI

New York Times

the IAEA wants to visit are all located in secure military bases. Traditionally, such facilities are considered off-limits to the IAEA. Weapons experts cautioned the equipment purchases and other activities could have non-nuclear purposes.

Mohamed ElBaradei, the Director-General of the IAEA, said here on Wednesday he has repeatedly asked Iran

for access to the two sites, but it has not yet been granted.

"We are following every credible piece of information," he said. Understanding the exact significance of what is happening at the two military sites is "important", he added. "We still have work to do, a lot of work."

He estimated that even with full Iranian cooperation, it would take at least two years to resolve all of the outstanding questions surrounding the country's nuclear programme. "We're not rushing," he said. "It takes time."

The deal the Europeans signed with Iran was designed to defuse the most urgent problem, Tehran's enrichment of uranium at civilian sites, which could have given it quick access to the raw material for making weapons. With that problem at least temporarily under control, inspectors and the US are now turning to the question of whether Iran has a parallel military nuclear programme that it has not declared.

—NYT

03 DEC 2004

INDIAN EXPRESS

SF 2
23/11

Gunmen kill senior Sunni cleric in Mosul

Agence France Presse

McBrien

Injured Iraqi man made no movements: NBC scribe

MOSUL, Nov. 22. — A senior Sunni Muslim cleric was killed today in a drive-by shooting in Mosul, medical sources said.

Gunmen in a vehicle shot Sheikh Faidh Mohammed Amin al-Faidhi as he was leaving a place of worship in Mosul's Al-Rifaq district around 9 a.m. (11.30 a.m. IST).

"The cleric was shot four times, in his chest and abdomen, and died shortly after he was transferred to hospital," Dr Abdel Jabbar Mohammed, a doctor at Medinat al-Teb Hospital, said. The cleric was a member of the Council of Muslim Scholars — the top Sunni Muslim authority in Iraq — and the brother of the organisation's spokesman in Baghdad, Mohammed Bashar al-Faidhi.

More bodies found

Four more bodies, at least three of them Iraqi soldiers, were found in the past 24 hours by the US

BAGHDAD, Nov. 22. — The NBC journalist who filmed the fatal shooting of an apparently injured and unarmed Iraqi by a US Marine inside a Fallujah mosque has written on his website that the wounded man made no sudden movements before he was shot.

In a posting on his website dated yesterday, Kevin Sites, a freelancer on assignment for NBC, wrote that he didn't see the wounded Iraqi make any movement before the Marine shot him but that only the Marine can explain his mental state before the shooting. "Through my viewfinder I can see him (Marine) raise the muzzle of his rifle in the direction of the wounded Iraqi. There are no sudden movements, no reacting or lunging," Sites wrote. — AP

military in Mosul, a US army officer said today.

"We found them at 10 p.m., they had been dead for at least a couple of hours and their bodies set against the sidewalk, shot in the head and hands tied," Lt. Col. Michael Kurilla said, adding that three of them were confirmed as being Iraqi soldiers.

The bodies were found near the Al-Yarmuk roundabout, an insurgent stronghold in western Mosul, and brought to 15 the

number of Iraqi soldiers thought to have been executed by rebels in Iraq's third largest city over the past two days.

Bush applauds Iraq debt pledge

US President George W Bush has applauded the decision by the so-called Paris Club of creditor nations to slash 80 per cent of the money Iraq owes them, and urged non-member countries to do the same, a report from Santiago adds.

23 NOV 2004 THE STATESMAN

Iran freeze on nuclear work

28/11 2004
Vienna, Nov. 22 (Reuters): Iran today froze sensitive nuclear work including uranium enrichment in a move likely to thwart US efforts to report the Islamic state to the UN Security Council for possible sanctions.

The suspension was confirmed by Mohamed ElBaradei, head of the UN's atomic watchdog, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). "I think pretty much everything has come to a halt right now," ElBaradei told reporters in Vienna. "We're just trying to apply seals and make sure everything has been stopped," he said.

Operations at the uranium conversion facility at Isfahan had also stopped, he said. The suspension of processes that could be used to develop nuclear weapons came into effect today — just three days ahead of a meeting of the IAEA board to discuss Iran's case.

Washington accuses Iran of developing nuclear weapons. It wants the IAEA board to refer Iran to the Security Council and sanctions imposed on Tehran for failing to disclose a range of nuclear work and facilities in the past.

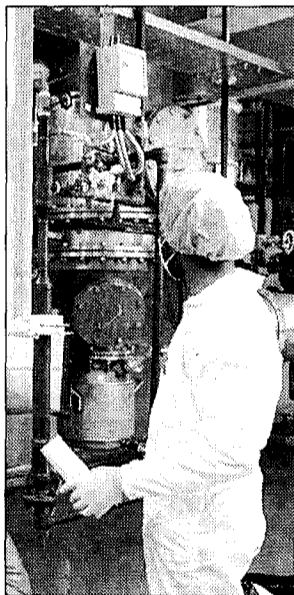
But Iran — which says its nuclear programme is geared entirely to electricity generation, not bombs — last week struck a deal with the EU to avoid Security Council referral if it suspended all sensitive nuclear work.

Tehran has said that this suspension would be short-lived. However, ElBaradei

urged the Iranians to maintain it for the duration of the IAEA inspection process.

"I think it's in Iran's interest to maintain the suspension while we are going through the (inspections), while we are trying to restore confidence that the programme is for peaceful purposes," he said.

The EU hopes to persuade Iran in the coming months to make the temporary suspension permanent by offering it a range of economic and political incentives. But it may still refer Iran to the Security Council if it goes back on the deal, British foreign secretary Jack Straw said.



A man works in the Isfahan nuclear facility, 400 km south of Tehran. (Reuters)

23 NOV 2004

THE TELEGRAPH

Iraq elections may be held in Jan

Escalating violence, Sunni boycott of polls may jeopardise process

Associated Press
UNHQ, November 20

IRAQ'S INTERIM government has "a good chance" of holding national polls by January 31, but voting might be delayed if violence escalates or Sunni Muslims decide to boycott, the country's UN envoy says.

UN Ambassador Samir Sumaidaie told a news conference Friday that the government plans on holding elections for a 275-member assembly in the last week of January, but "what happens in the next weeks will be important."

"The recent military operation in Fallujah has been very positive in removing a safe haven from the terrorists," he said. "We clearly have reduced the ability of the terrorists to launch an organised campaign." But in the run-up to the election, Sumaidaie said the government will be closely watching not just the security situation and threats from militants, but political developments.

He praised the Iraqi people for thwarting all attempts so far by "terrorists" to create "sectarian warfare or strife or civil war" between the majority Shiites and minority Sunnis. "The government is seriously engaging nationalist and ... Sunni groups, to persuade them to take part in the political process," and is also "making every effort" to persuade supporters of "violent factions" to take part in the election, he said.

Sumaidaie was asked whether a Sunni boycott would threaten the election by undermining its credibility. "That's right," he said. "If all the Sunnis act as a bloc, you would be right, but that's unlikely. There is no chance that there is a blanket Sunni authority that says, 'We shall not take part in the election.' I believe there are some Sunni groups that have advocated this, but that is by no means representative of the general Sunni population."

The Iraqi ambassador said the country was facing "a determined challenge to derail the political process" and was not helped by actions like the recent statement by 29 Saudi scholars supporting violence and opponents of the government.

"This statement is used by the



Iraqi National Guards and a US soldier carry a body, believed to be that of an Iraqi soldier, in Mosul on Saturday.

terrorists in Iraq as justification for their deeds," he said. Nonetheless, Sumaidaie said, "I believe we have a good chance of still meeting the (January) target" for elections. If ... at that time it is determined that we need a bit more time, then I think the situation will be reviewed," he said. But at the moment, technical preparations for the election are moving forward "in a timely fashion," Sumaidaie said.

"The security situation is moving forward also and the political situation is moving, and we hope and trust that all these things will converge and we will have the elections on time," he said.

Iraq's interim government has been pressing for the United Nations to increase its international

staff ahead of elections, from the current ceiling of 35. The ambassador said he believes it is being raised to 59, and that "an increase is in the pipeline." Annan said last month he wants to increase the staff ahead of elections, but UN officials said they could not confirm a second increase.

Police station attacked: Insurgents attacked a police station Saturday in a Sunni Muslim neighbourhood in Baghdad where U.S. and Iraqi troops raided a major mosque the day before in a crackdown on Sunni militants. Iraqi officials were trying to identify four decapitated bodies found in Mosul.

American and Iraqi forces detained 30 suspected guerrillas overnight in Mosul, the US military

said today.

In western Baghdad, heavy fighting broke out between gunmen and Iraqi National Guards and American troops. Three Iraqi National Guardsmen were killed by roadside bombs in the same area, police said.

In the nearby Khadra area, two US troops on patrol were injured when a roadside bomb exploded near their convoy, said policeman Ali Hussein of the Khadra police station. The US military had no immediate confirmation of the incident. Insurgents also attacked a police station in northwestern Baghdad with grenades.

US troops discovered four decapitated bodies during military operations to purge insurgents from the northern city of Mosul.

Caught in a triangle of death

Associated Press
Baghdad, November 20

A PORTLY Shia cleric, Abu Qusai, sheds his black robe for a training suit and exchanges his white turban for a baseball cap, an effort to mask his identity for a risky trip through what has become known as the "triangle of death".

The region has become a death zone for many Shias, Westerners and members of the Iraqi security services, many of whom have become the victims of Sunni insurgents and gunmen — some who receive bounties of several thousand dollars.

The triangle — formed by the cities of Youssifiyah to the northwest, Latifiyah to the south and Mahmoudiya to the east — holds the fastest routes from Baghdad southward to the Shia shrines in Najaf and Karbala. The area is no less dangerous for foreigners than Fallujah and Ramadi.

French journalists Christian Chesnot and Georges Malbrunot disappeared on August 20 on their way from Baghdad to Najaf. They are missing, though their Syrian driver, Mohammed al-Joundi, was found by US troops last week in Fallujah. Two members of a Polish TV crew were killed and a third was wounded in an attack near Mahmoudiya in May. Four months earlier, two Iraqis working for CNN were shot and killed while travelling through the same area.

Bayan Jaber of the major Shia political party said, a week ago, five Shias travelling to Najaf from Diyala province near Iranian border were waylaid in the "triangle of death" and shot. The attackers demanded — and received — \$15,000 from their families to return the bodies. Insurgent leaders offer bounties for killing certain kinds: \$1,000 for a Shia, \$2,000 for an Iraqi National Guard member and \$3,000 for an American.

5/11/11 **Fallujah falls** 18/11

But the Iraqi insurgency is unbowed

US and such Iraqi forces close to them, are in occupation of most of Fallujah, a long-time rebel stronghold. But the "victory" can hardly be seen as decisive which will deliver a knockout blow to the insurgents. As things stand now, in the kind of irregular guerrilla warfare that the insurgents are staging they know that they will lose in any direct confrontation with American forces. Their gameplan, therefore, is not to have any central headquarters but present a moving target while staging a war of attrition.

This is not about the occupation of territory, but a form of mobile warfare where the idea is to harass American forces and their collaborators wherever vulnerable. And this is what is happening — hundreds of fighters have escaped Fallujah to regroup while rebel masterminds Abu Musab al-Zarqawi and Sheik Abdullah al-Janabi also got away. Meanwhile, the insurgency has spread all over the Sunni triangle in northern and central Iraq. Baghdad is rocked by nightly explosions, including inside the heavily fortified Green Zone. Even President Bush expects the fighting to escalate, rather than die down, after the fall of Fallujah.

All this fighting is in aid of elections supposed to be held in January next year, the argument being that if there are major no-go areas like Fallujah, the entire exercise will be meaningless. But influential Sunni clergymen have called for a boycott of the elections in response to the assault on Fallujah.

If the boycott holds and the Sunni Muslims don't vote, the results will be questionable anyway. Moreover, it is a moot issue whether political authority will really be devolved to elected politicians; if that doesn't happen, and Americans continue pulling the strings, it will be back to square one.

A couple of aspects about the insurgency seems to be notable. One, according to Prime Minister Ayad Allawi fighters from Syria, Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan and Morocco are among the insurgents, which means that Iraq is becoming a magnet for international *ihadists*, just as many feared.

In other words, President Bush, far from capturing Osama bin Laden, is actually helping him to open up a second front. Two, the insurgents are kidnapping or killing those who collaborate with American troops in any way. This can be an effective way of disrupting the logistics of occupation forces, making it difficult for them to operate in Iraq, while avoiding a head-on confrontation where the odds would be in favour of American forces. Even Prime Minister Allawi's cousin has been kidnapped. The fall of Fallujah doesn't mean coalition forces have been able to come up with an answer to such classic hit-and-run guerrilla tactics.

18 NOV 2004

THE STATESMAN

West Asia ①

And this'll be called victory...

What can be more shocking than the image of a Marine shooting dead a wounded, unarmed man sheltering in a mosque? Yet, a camera never tells the whole tale. Mujahideen regularly boobytrap themselves when dying. SIMON JENKINS on the appalling cost of taking Fallujah

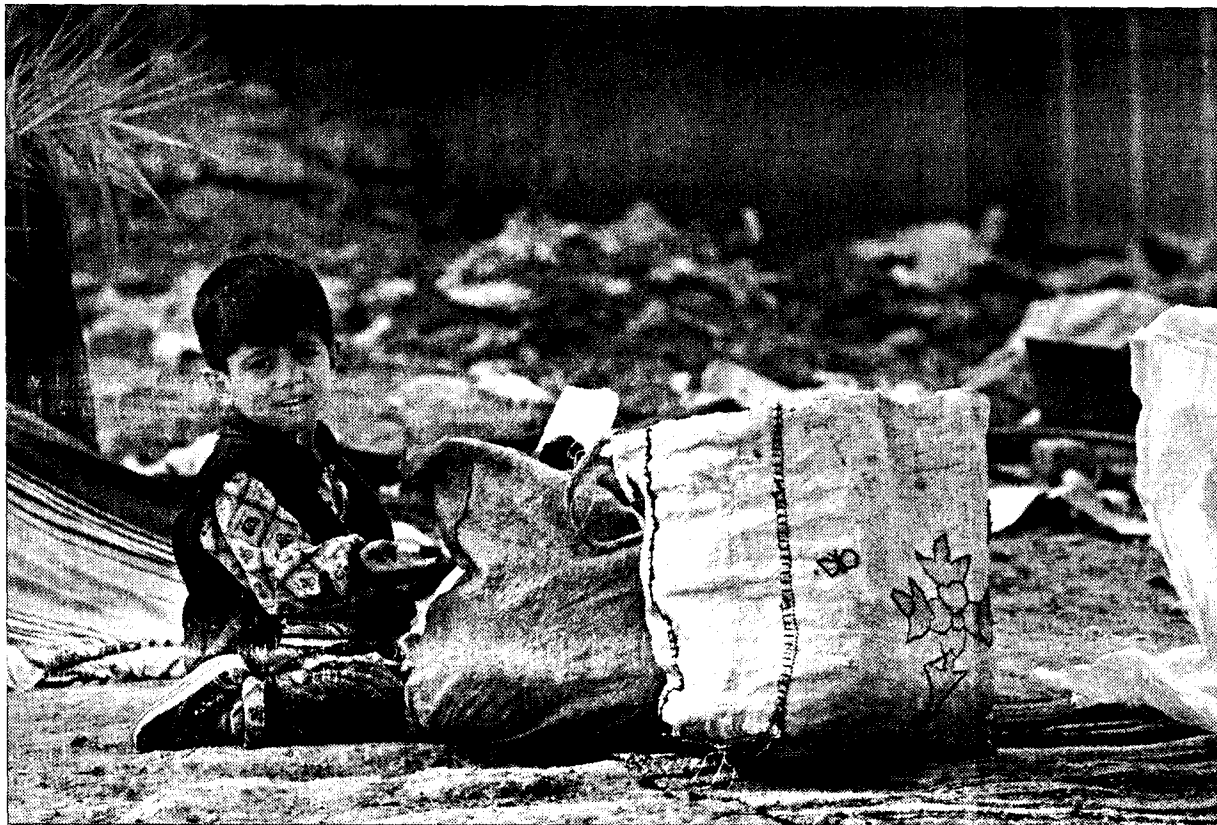
WAR still deracinates. The bangs and the cries and the blood suspend normal reason and turn means into ends. "We kill and break things," says a US Marine proudly. He goes into Fallujah and does just that, cameras rolling. But then a soldier is filmed killing an unarmed man in cold blood and we are shocked. Horror movie becomes reality. This is not the moral script. Hey, soldier, you shouldn't have done that.

There are many things soldiers would be better not doing, including going to Iraq in the first place. They would be better not putting cities to fire and the sword and calling it "building democracy". But America wants it. Tony Blair and his Labour Party want it. In Vietnam, the Americans destroyed the village to save it. In Iraq we destroy the city to save it.

Tuesday's image from Fallujah of a Marine shooting a wounded prisoner in a mosque was indeed shocking. Yet, a camera never tells the whole tale. Mujahideen regularly boobytrap themselves when dying. Any movement in an apparently inert body could be an act of detonation. My own instinct in this lethal context might well be to shoot first and consult the rules later. We put soldiers in this moral swamp and can hardly complain when sometimes the swamp overwhelms them.

The streets of Fallujah are not Kentish Town police station, nor was Abu Ghraib prison Wormwood Scrubs. Yet, these awful incidents make an impact for being suddenly so ordinary. We blank out the use of cluster shells against villages and thousand pounders on residential districts because the resulting horror is beyond our ken. It's like a computer game. But we recognise the abuse and killing of unarmed prisoners. Such events turn statistics into human beings. It is the deed not the dead that shocks us.

Nothing in Iraq has so illumined the folly of this occupation as the now completed suppression of Fallujah. When Napoleon entered Moscow in 1812 after the Battle of Borodino, he was mystified. He too found a city emptied of people. He found buildings aflame on all sides. There was no enemy to admit defeat and no one to supply his



A boy with his belongings waits for his mother in Baghdad having fled the fighting in Fallujah. — AFP

troops. The Muscovites had simply melted away, taking their food and their pride with them. Napoleon had conquered not an empire but a desert, and that desert eventually consumed his army and forced its retreat.

The assault on Fallujah was billed as the defining battle of the war. The conquest would make possible the January elections, talisman of the entire occupation. This city of 2,50,000 people, less than an hour west of Baghdad on the main Jordan road, was a base for terror attacks throughout the Sunni triangle. Without Fallujah under control, it was argued, elections would be hopeless.

Yet, hopeless too must be the holding of Fallujah. Such cities cannot be subjugated by American troops for any period of time. The new Iraq Army, virtually useless in the assault, cannot take their place. They would desert en masse, as 400 reportedly did during the siege. The only Iraqi troops prepared to fight the Sunnis are their sworn enemies, the Kurdish peshmerga irregulars. To leave them garrisoning Fallujah would be madness. As for the repopulation of the city -- from which 90 per cent of citizens are said to have fled -- this will bring back the guerrillas and put the Americans under renewed attack.

The Russian general, Kutusov, called Moscow "the sponge that will suck Napoleon dry". Sunni Iraq is taking on the same function for the Americans. The insurgency has now spread west, north and east, to Ramadi, Mosul and Samarra. Guerrillas supposedly driven from Samarra in a furious battle just two months ago are now back. Aerial bombardment was this week deployed against the small town of Baquba just north of Baghdad, with inevitable civilian casualties. How long before the battle for Baghdad resumes, and its inhabitants again hear the drone of spy planes and the roar of "shock and awe"?

In this part of Iraq there is no Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani to call the al-Sadr bandits to order, as in Najaf and Karbala. Fallujah may have been destabilising the Sunni triangle, but the manner of its suppression will not restabilise it. It will merely shift more of the varying geometry of power to the Mujahideen and from the sheikhs and local gangsters grown rich on stealing "reconstruction" money. Iyad Allawi's aides are talking openly about the elections being impossible. This is the opposite of what Fallujah was supposed to achieve.

Whether the Fallujah assault is more counterproductive than the

rest of the neocon strategy for Iraq is moot. Even the most ardent interventionist must find its ineptitude astounding. The Pentagon's handling of the Sunnis seems designed to ensure that they boycott elections and thus speed the break-up of Iraq.

The Sunnis were stripped of jobs in the army, police and civil service. Their pensions were stopped. Local businesses were wrecked in a tidal wave of imports. When I visited Fallujah a year ago, Westerners could walk in the market and talk to the shopkeepers. An election was not inconceivable, though the local police had been curiously denied weapons or armour.

Today, Sunni Iraq is a no-go area for Westerners. The main party has said it will abandon the democratic process. The Mujahideen may have been driven out of Fallujah, but the place is a ghost town and the cost has been appalling, to the Marines, to the town and to local people. Peace, stability and democracy seem as distant as ever. Forget the invasion. It is the occupation that has failed.

No statement about Iraq is more absurd than that "we must stay to finish the job". What job? A dozen more Fallujahs? The thesis that leaving Iraq would plunge it into anarchy and warlordism defies the

facts on the ground. Iraq south of Kurdistan is in a state of anarchy already, a land of suicide bombings, kidnapping, hijackings and gangland mayhem. There is no law or order, no public administration or police or proper banking. Its streets are Wild West. The occupying force is entombed in bases it can barely defend or supply. Occasional patrols are target practice for terrorists. Iraq is a desert in which the Americans and British rule nothing but their forts, like the French Foreign Legion in the Sahara.

It might sometimes be the case that any country occupied by British troops must, by definition, be better off with them than without them. Not in Iraq. Perhaps Britain alone (or even the excluded US State Department) might have led post-Saddam Iraq to a sort of stability. That hope is gone. Iraq is world capital of terrorism, the creation of two leaders who promised the world that would not be so. They have left their soldiers as targets for every killer in West Asia and wrecked a nation in the process.

Nobody knows what is going to happen in Iraq, certainly nobody in any government. We can only pray that George Bush will soon tire of the killing and withdraw his troops before his final term of office is blighted by it. Britain can follow meekly in his wake. Only then can Iraq start its painful search for a post-Saddam settlement, initially with bloodshed, then probably with partition. That is what happens when strong men fall, as in Yugoslavia.

Before then the Americans will again have to declare a victory in Fallujah and get out. Otherwise the bloodshed will never stop. Fallujah and the towns round it will be centres of hatred and violence against the West until the West departs. Of course most Iraqis want democracy, like they want security. In 18 months of occupation, the West has given them neither. Insofar as anyone can tell, all but those in the pay of the West want the West to go.

The aftermath is not our concern. What Iraqis do next is their business, because we have failed in trying to make it ours. We are not the subject of the Iraqi verb. The subject is they.

— *The Times, London.*

Shooting sparks Arab rage

'Slender with spine of steel'

Dubai, Nov. 17 (Reuters): Arabs were torn between seething rage at images of a US soldier shooting dead a wounded Iraqi in a mosque and dismay at Iraqi insurgents in Falluja for turning holy mosques into battlegrounds.

Viewers said images, which Arab televisions aired repeatedly of a Marine killing a severely injured Iraqi, fuelled growing hatred against America and helped create more "terrorists".

"I am not a jihadist. I am just a normal Muslim but such scenes are pushing me to J", said Dubai-based engineer Abdullah. "We don't expect this from the representative of democracy in the world."

"This is one of the things we saw on TV. God knows how many crimes they have committed which we have not seen," he added.

In Saudi Arabia — the birthplace of Islam and of al-Qaida leader Osama bin Laden, whose group carried out bombings in the country — residents said insurgents were to blame for taking their battle into mosques.

"If I was in the US soldier's place I would have killed all the insurgents because they are mercenaries," said Saudi Zaher al-Saleh, a 32-year-old teacher. "They have turned the mosques into battlefields and they're killing civilians."

Muslims said pictures showing Marines lounging with their guns in a Falluja mosque were "insulting".

They said soldiers "sullied the ground with their boots" at the mosque where Muslims are obliged to take off their shoes in respect for the house of God. "They are entering dangerous waters. If they think they are getting rid of terrorists this way, they are mistaken. They are creating more terrorists than killing them," added Abdallah.

International human rights groups said the killing could amount to a war crime and showed the need to better train US forces about the laws of war. The US military opened an investigation into whether the Marine acted in self-defence, broke US military law or committed a war crime in the fatal shooting of a wounded Iraqi in Falluja, the scene of fierce fighting between US forces and Iraqi and Islamist militants in the past week. That shooting was caught on videotape by an NBC television crew embedded with the Marines.

American mortars pummeled parts of Falluja today as troops hunted for guerrillas still fighting in the Iraqi city after nine days of bombardment. US officers said Marines were "cleaning up" fragments of an insurgent force of Iraqi and foreign Islamists and Saddam loyalists.



A Marine with a baby during the evacuation of civilians from Falluja. (AFP)

Islamist extremists called for revenge through their websites and cursed pro-US Muslim leaders for remaining silent. "Oh God your enemies have killed your believers in one of your houses. God take revenge for us," one chatter said.

Some Muslims saw the killing as a personal affront.

"It's as if they had killed every one of us. Today, it's that poor man, tomorrow, it will be me," said Sherine Mohamed, 27, a financial analyst. "Even if militants didn't respect mosque sanctities, US soldiers should have done so because they claim to help Iraqis."

SALLY POOK

London, Nov. 17: Margaret Hassan spent more than 30 years of her life devoted to aid work among the disadvantaged in her adoptive homeland of Iraq.

Born in Dublin and brought up in England, she moved to Iraq after marrying Tahseen Ali Hassan, an engineer, whom she met at university. Once in Baghdad, she began working for the British Council, teaching English to Iraqis. She soon developed a passion for the country, converted to Islam and took Iraqi citizenship.

After Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait in 1990 the council closed its offices and Hassan joined Care International, the world's largest aid organisation. The charity runs nutrition, health and water programmes in Iraq.

Known locally as "modern-day Mother Teresa", Hassan was described by friends as an extraordinary woman. She became a tireless advocate on behalf of the Iraqi people, particularly children.



Margaret Hassan

"She is one of those slender people with a spine of steel," said Felicity Arbuthnot, a film-maker who travelled to Iraq to document her work.

Hassan was a vehement opponent of the sanctions imposed against Iraq. Before the UN and MPs in London that a fresh conflict would provoke a humanitarian catastrophe. "The Iraqi people are already living through a terrible emergency," she told a House of Commons briefing.

THE DAILY TELEGRAPH

Iraq aid worker blindfolded and shot by rebels

Guardian News Service
Baghdad, November 17

THE FAMILY of Margaret Hassan on Tuesday night accepted that the aid worker taken hostage by Iraqi insurgents a month ago had probably been murdered, after analysis of a video which showed a masked gunman shooting a blindfolded woman in the head.

The video, which emerged a week ago but was kept secret, has been studied by experts, and both British diplomats and relatives of Hassan said they now believed it showed the 59-year-old and that she had been killed.

Last night her brother, Michael, and her sisters Deirdre, Geraldine and Kathryn Fitzsimons said her murder was "unforgivable". "Our hearts are broken," they said in a statement. "We have kept hoping for as long as we could, but we now have to accept that Margaret has probably gone and at last her suffering has ended. Those who are guilty of this atrocious act, and those who support them, have no excuses. Nobody can justify this. Margaret was against sanctions and the war."

Her husband, Tahseen Ali Hassan, said: "If she's dead I want to know where she is so I can bury her in peace."

The Arabic television channel al-Jazeera said last night that in the video the gunman identified the woman as Hassan. She wore an orange jumpsuit. "It shows a hooded person pointing a pistol at the head of a blindfolded woman before shooting her," said Jihad Ballout, the channel's spokesman. Unlike other videos, there were no flags to identify the militant group.

The station said yesterday that it had received the video six days ago and then called in British diplomats to its headquarters in Doha, Qatar, to confirm its authenticity. It said it would not broadcast the tape. "We don't show acts of killing," Ballout said. "We've never done



A file photograph of Margaret Hassan.

REACTIONS

• Tony Blair's office said in a statement: 'The Prime Minister sends his sympathy to the family of Margaret Hassan and shares their abhorrence at the cruel treatment of someone who devoted so many years of her life to helping the people of Iraq'

• Irish PM Bertie Ahern said the kidnapers 'stand condemned by... the entire international community'

• UK foreign secretary Jack Straw said: 'To kidnap and kill anyone is inexcusable. But it is repugnant to commit such a crime against a woman who has spent most of her life working for the good of the people of Iraq'

it before, outside war."

It is not clear who kidnapped Mrs Hassan. No claim of responsibility has yet been made. A series of videos has been released, showing her looking exhausted and pleading for her life. In one, which was not broadcast, she faints and a bucket of water is apparently thrown over her.

18 NOV 2004

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

Brace for new battles: Zarqawi

Dubai: An audiotape on an Islamist website purportedly from Iraq's most wanted man, Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi, has urged



his supporters to brace for new battles against US forces after the showdown in Falluja.

"The enemy... has mobilised most of its assets and potential to destroy Islam in Falluja. Once they have finished in Falluja, they will head towards you," the voice on the tape released on Monday said, urging insurgents to seize the initiative.

"Be cautious and foil their plan," he said, in an

implicit recognition that the week-long battle in Falluja, the rebel hotspot west of Baghdad, was virtually lost for the insurgents under US assault for the past week.

The message, posted on <http://hal595.S27.Xrea.Com/up/img/up092.Zip>, was addressed to "the heroes of Baghdad and Al-Anbar", the province which is home to Falluja, to "the lions of Mosul" in northern Iraq and the "lion cubs of Diyala, Samarra and Salahadin".

"Enemies are avoiding fighting us for fear of being dispersed and of a war of attrition," and "they are weak and cannot widen the battle," it said, warning that US forces would confront one insurgent stronghold after another. AFP

17 NOV 2004

THE TIMES OF INDIA

Iran will not enrich uranium

Vienna (Austria): Iran has notified the UN nuclear watchdog in writing that it will suspend uranium enrichment and linked activities to dispel suspicions that it is trying to build nuclear arms, diplomats said on Monday.

By its move, Iran appeared to have dropped demands to modify a tentative deal worked out on November 7 with European negotiators, agreeing instead to continue freezing enrichment and also to suspend related activities, diplomats said.

"Basically it's a full suspension," said one of the diplomats. Washington has argued that Iran's enrichment activities are part of a nuclear arms programme.

The diplomat said that Iran had also fulfilled a key part of the deal by formally informing the International Atomic Energy Agency of its decision. AP

Iran 'agrees' to suspend N-projects

VIENNA, Nov. 14. — Iran has notified the UN nuclear watchdog in writing that it will to suspend uranium enrichment and linked activities to dispel suspicions that it is trying to build nuclear arms, diplomats said today.

By its move, Iran appeared to have dropped demands to modify a tentative deal worked out on 7 November with European negotiators, agreeing instead to continue freezing enrichment and also to suspend related activities, diplomats said. "Basically it's a full suspension," said one of the diplomats, speaking on condition of anonymity. "Its what the Europeans were looking for."

Washington has argued that Iran's enrichment activities are part of a nuclear arms programme.

The diplomat said Iran had also fulfilled a key part of the deal by formally informing the UN nuclear watchdog agency — the International Atomic Energy Agency — of its decision. — AP

15 NOV 2004

THE STATESMAN

Pact reached with Big-3 on N-issue: Iran

9-17-97 *11:45 AM* *Iran*
Tehran: Hoping to avoid a UN showdown, Iran and the European Union's three big powers reached a preliminary agreement over Tehran's nuclear programme, Iran's chief negotiator said.

Meanwhile, lawmakers in Iran's conservative-dominated parliament pushed for a bill banning the production of nuclear weapons in a gesture aimed at building more international trust.

The preliminary agreement worked out in Paris with Britain, France and Germany could be finalised in the next few days, chief Iranian negotiator Hossein Mousavian told state-run Iranian Television

on Sunday from the French capital, where talks wrapped up on Saturday.

If approved, the deal would be a major breakthrough after months of threats and negotiations and could spare Iran from being taken before the UN security council, where the United States has warned it would seek to impose economic sanctions unless Tehran gives up all uranium enrichment activities, a technology that can produce nuclear fuel or atomic weapons.

The head of the International Atomic Energy Agency, Mohamed Elbaradei, called the agreement "a step in the right direction." AP

9 NOV 2004

THE TIMES OF INDIA

60-day emergency in Iraq

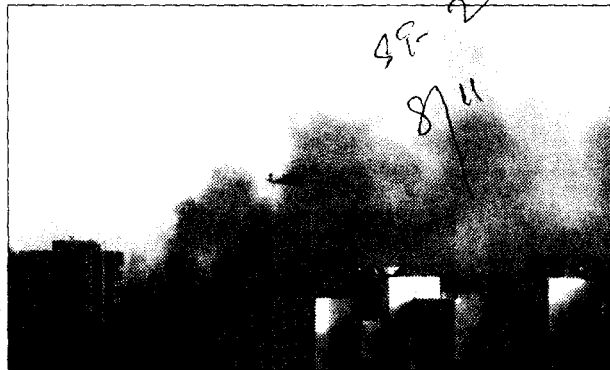
Associated Press

BAGHDAD, Nov. 7. — The government declared a 60-day state of emergency throughout most of the country today, as US and Iraqi forces prepared for an expected all-out assault on rebels in Fallujah. Insurgents escalated a wave of violence that has killed more than 50 people in the past two days.

Heavy explosions were heard in Baghdad as government spokesman Mr Thair Hassan al-Naqeeb announced the state of emergency over the entire country except Kurdish areas in the north.

"It is going to be a curfew. It is going to be so many things, but tomorrow the prime minister will mention it," he said.

Mr Al-Naqeeb declined to say whether the announcement signalled an imminent attack on the insurgent stronghold Fallujah, the statement came as



A US helicopter hovers over black smoke billowing from the Green Zone in Baghdad on Sunday. — AFP

insurgents carried out a second day of assaults in central Iraq, attacking police stations, gunning down government officials and setting off bombs.

A car bomb exploded near the Baghdad home of Iraq's finance minister, Mr Adil Abdel-Mahdi, but neither him nor any of his family were in his house at the time, the interior ministry said. The wave of violence sweeping the troubled Sunni triangle north and west of Baghdad, may

be aimed at relieving pressure on Fallujah, where about 10,000 American troops are massing for a major assault if Mr Allawi gives the green light.

At dawn today, armed rebels launched attacks against police stations in western Anbar province, killing 22 people. At least seven of those killed were policemen. The attacks came a day after insurgents in Samarra stormed a police station, triggered two suicide car bombs and

fired mortars at government installations. Twenty-nine people, were killed, the US military said. Forty others were injured. Early today, Marines fired a barrage of artillery at rebel positions inside Fallujah and clashed with insurgents killing at least 16.

The Al-Qaida affiliate group of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi claimed responsibility for attacks in Samarra, Ramadi and Baghdad.

The claims could not be verified, but US officials believe al-Zarqawi's group uses Fallujah as a base. US intelligence estimates there are about 3,000 insurgents dug in behind booby traps in Fallujah.

"I cannot claim that entering Fallujah will end the terrorist attacks in Iraq," Iraq's national security adviser, Mr Qassem Dawoud, told *Al-Arabiya* TV. "But I can say that we will deal with a very big pocket of terrorism and we will uproot it."

Ebadi sues US over memoirs

New York: Nobel Peace Prize
2003 winner



Shirin Ebadi has sued the United States because its economic embargo on Iran is blocking publication

of her memoirs in America, a literary agency said on Wednesday.

Iranian human rights lawyer Ebadi said she wanted to write a book for a US and international audience about her life and career "as a woman, a mother and a lawyer living and working in a country that confronts many human rights problems."

The suit filed by Ebadi and the Strothman Agency seeks to strike down US Treasury Department regulations requiring a license to publish authors from embargoed countries such as Iran—a nation dubbed in 2002 as part of the 'axis of evil' by President Bush along with Iraq and North Korea.

"The ... regulations seem to defy the values of free expression and exchange of ideas, the US promotes," Ebadi said in her suit.

She has completed a draft of the book in Farsi but needs the help of an agent and editor in America to translate and rewrite it for international readers. But Office of Foreign Assets Control rules are blocking her from signing a contract with the Boston-based Strothman Agency, which wants to represent her and negotiate with publishers on her behalf.

Ebadi was Iran's first female judge until she was forced to step down after the revolution. She has continued to fight for human rights, especially for women and children, under Iran's hardline Islamic government.

"The book would give American readers a greater understanding of Iranian society and of the determination of one woman to seek justice in a society in which it is difficult for women to achieve influence in public affairs," Ebadi said. Reuters

h- Arab
11-1

Deputy governor of Baghdad shot dead

2/11

Baghdad: A deputy governor of Baghdad, Hassam Kamel Abdel Fattah, was shot dead by unknown assailants in the southern district of Dora on Monday, Iraq's interior ministry said. "He was travelling to work by car at about 7:47 a.m. when unknown assailants gunned him down," said ministry spokesman Adnan Abdul Rahman.

Two bodyguards were also injured in the ambush, which occurred not far from Fattah's home, he said.

High-profile political figures and other people in authority are frequently targeted by insurgents who are bent on undermining the US-backed interim government and wreaking havoc in the run up to elections promised by January.

A senior Iraqi diplomat was shot dead last Wednesday while walking home from Iraq's foreign ministry by unknown attackers who at first tried to kidnap him. Qusay Mehdi was Iraq's charge d'affaires to the United Arab Emirates from June 2003 until last month and had been working at the foreign ministry waiting his next assignment.

Meanwhile, a brigade of fresh US troops arriving in Baghdad will push the total US troop presence in the capital to around 40,000 by Monday, as planners prepare for the coming assault on insurgent hotspots to the West and the Iraqi elections in January.

Army units that were slated to depart are being held back until after the elections, causing the overall number of US troops in Iraq to swell to around 1,42,000, the highest level since the summer of 2003.

At camp Victory North, the sprawling headquarters of the army's 1st Cavalry division, the mess hall and housing trailers are brimming to capacity with the arrival

of the 3,700-member Louisiana-based 256th enhanced separate brigade. A National Guard unit that has been rolling into Baghdad over the past few days. The arrival of the 256th was supposed to have been timed with the departure of the 1st Cavalry's 2nd Brigade, which was scheduled to prepare to return to Fort Hood, Texas in November. But the Pentagon delayed the 2nd Brigade's departure by two months, military officials said. Agencies

17 killed in Tikrit

Tikrit: Seventeen Iraqis were killed and eight wounded when two mortars slammed into a hostel used by workers at a local factory in Tikrit, 180 km north of Baghdad, officials said on Monday.

The shells had been intended for a nearby US base, but missed their target, said police Colonel Ibrahim Jaburi, adding that it was the second time the hostel had been hit by mistake. AFP

2 NOV 2004

THE TIMES OF INDIA

Fresh twist to missing arms

JIM DWYER AND
DAVID E. SANGER

Washington, Oct. 27: White House officials reasserted yesterday that 380 tons of powerful explosives may have disappeared from a vast Iraqi military complex while Saddam Hussein controlled Iraq, saying a brigade of American soldiers did not find the explosives when they visited the complex on April 10, 2003, the day after Baghdad fell.

But the unit's commander said in an interview yesterday that his troops had not searched the site and had merely stopped there overnight.

The commander, Colonel Joseph Anderson, of the Second Brigade of the army's 101st Airborne Division, said he did not learn until this week that the site, Al Qaqaa, was considered sensitive, or that international inspectors had visited it before the war began in 2003 to inspect explosives that they had tagged during a decade of monitoring.

Colonel Anderson, who is now the chief-of-staff for the division and who spoke by telephone from Fort Campbell, Kentucky, said his troops had been driving north toward Baghdad and had paused at Al



Fahrenheit 9/11 director Michael Moore and actor Roseanne Barr at an anti-Bush rally in Toledo, Ohio. (AFP)

Qaqaa to make plans for their next push.

"We happened to stumble on it," he said. "I didn't know what the place was supposed to be. We did not get involved in any of the bunkers. It was not our mission. It was not our focus. We were just stopping there on our way to Baghdad. The plan was to leave that very same day. The plan was not to go in there and start searching. It looked like all the other ammunition supply points we

had seen already."

What had been, for the colonel and his troops, an unremarkable moment during the sweep to Baghdad took on new significance this week, after *The New York Times*, working with the CBS News programme *60 Minutes*, reported that the explosives at Al Qaqaa, mainly HMX and RDX, had disappeared since the invasion.

President Bush's aides said that because the soldiers

had found no trace of the missing explosives on April 10, they could have been removed before the invasion. At the Pentagon, a senior official, acknowledged that the timing of the disappearance remained uncertain.

The official suggested that the material could have vanished while Saddam was still in power, sometime between mid-March, when the international inspectors left, and April 3, when members of the Third Infantry Division fought with Iraqis inside Al Qaqaa. At the time, it was reported that those soldiers found a white powder that was tentatively identified as explosives.

The 101st Airborne Division arrived April 10 and left the next day. The next recorded visit by Americans came on May 27, when Task Force 75 inspected Al Qaqaa, but did not find the large quantities of explosives that had been seen in mid-March by the international inspectors. By then, Al Qaqaa had plainly been looted.

Colonel Anderson said he did not see any obvious signs of damage when he arrived on April 10, but that his focus was strictly on finding a secure place to collect his troops.

NEW YORK TIMES NEWS SERVICE

THE TELEGRAPH

28 OCT 2004

Iraq explosives go missing

NO TRACE OF NEARLY 400 TONS OF NUKE MATERIAL

Agence France-Presse
Vienna, October 25

NEARLY 400 tons of powerful explosives that could be used in conventional or nuclear missiles disappeared from an unguarded military installation in Iraq, the International Atomic Energy Agency said.

The Iraqi ministry of science and technology informed the IAEA of the disappearance of nearly 380 tons of mainly HMX and RDX explosive material on October 10, agency spokeswoman Melissa Fleming said, confirming a report in *The New York Times*.

"It can be used in a nuclear explosion device, for the explosion," she said, adding: "That's why it was under IAEA verification and monitoring" before the March 2003 US-led invasion of Iraq.

The New York Times said the material "could produce bombs strong enough to shatter airplanes or tear apart buildings".

What is their power of destruction?

A glance at the destructive power of the explosives which IAEA claims is missing from Iraq:

> HMX

High melting explosives, as they are scientifically known, are among the most powerful in use by the world's militaries today. HMX, also known as octogen, is made from hexamine, ammonium nitrate, nitric acid and acetic acid. Because it detonates at high

Fleming noted: "From a proliferation standpoint there is a possible application in nuclear weapons, (but) the most immediate concern is the threat of the explosive falling in the wrong hands and being used to commit



The Al-Qaqa complex in Youssefiya from which the explosives are missing.

temperatures, it is used in various kinds of explosives, rocket fuels and turbine engines.

> RDX

Also referred to as cyclonite or hexogen, RDX is a white crystalline solid usually used in mixtures with other explosives, oils or waxes. Rarely used alone, it has a high degree of stability in storage and is considered the most powerful of the high explosives used by militaries.

terrorist acts," she said. *The New York Times* reported that the explosives disappeared from the sprawling Al-Qaqa facility, which "was supposed to be under American military control but is now a no man's land,

After UN weapons inspectors left Iraq under US pressure last year, "our only ability ... to monitor these sites is through satellite imagery. It was very difficult to detect here (from IAEA headquarters in Vienna), because the things were in bunkers", Fleming said.

Democratic presidential candidate John Kerry's campaign immediately demanded answers over the missing materiel from President George W. Bush. "Today, the Bush administration must answer for what may be the most grave and catastrophic mistake in a tragic series of blunders in Iraq," Kerry's senior adviser Joe Lockhart said on Monday. "How did they fail to secure nearly 380 tons of known, deadly explosives despite clear warnings from the International Atomic Energy Agency to do so? Why was this information unearthed by reporters — and was it covered up by our national security officials?"

> PLASTIC EXPLOSIVES

Experts say both HMX and RDX are key ingredients in plastic explosives such as Semtex and C-4, putty-like military substances that easily can be shaped. Libyan terrorists used just 1 pound of Semtex in 1988 to down Pan Am Flight 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland, killing 270 people. C-4 was used in the October 2000 bombing of the USS Cole in Yemen that killed 17 US sailors.

still picked over by looters as recently as Sunday".

The report added: "White House and Pentagon officials acknowledge that the explosives vanished some time after the American-led invasion".

26 OCT 2004

400 tonnes of explosives missing in Iraq

The Times, London

BAGHDAD, Oct. 25. — Hundreds of tonnes of high explosives that could be used to detonate nuclear weapons have vanished in Iraq since the United States and Britain invaded, the International Atomic Energy Agency said today.

The United Nations nuclear watchdog said that at least 400 tonnes of powerful explosives, known as HMX and RDX and which could be used to manufacture terrorist bombs, had disappeared from the Al-Qaqaa military facility just south of Baghdad.

The announcement, and the heightened risk that the invasion could have led to the proliferation of the weapons that it aimed to curb, came at the

worst possible time for President Mr Bush, just seven days before the American presidential election.

Mr Scott McClellan, one of Mr Bush's senior spokesmen, played down the threat. He said that the administration's first concern was whether the weapons missing from Al-Qaqaa posed a nuclear proliferation threat, and they did not. "We have destroyed more than 243,000 munitions," he said. "We've secured another nearly 163,000 that will be destroyed."

In the early days after it took Baghdad last year, the US-led coalition was criticised for allowing looting on a massive scale that stripped bare government buildings, including sensitive military facilities. The disappearance came just weeks after the IAEA said that preci-

One of Bush's greatest blunders: Kerry

DOVER (New Hampshire), Oct. 25. — The IAEA announcement, and the heightened risk that the invasion could have led to the proliferation of the very weapons that it aimed to curb, came at the worst possible time for President Bush, just seven days before the American presidential election. Mr John Kerry, Mr Bush's Democratic challenger, pounced on the announcement. At a rally in New Hampshire, he said that Mr Bush had committed "one of the greatest blunders" of his Administration in failing to secure the explosives.

"George W. Bush who talks tough - and brags about making America safer, has once again failed to deliver," Mr Kerry said. "After being warned about the danger of major stockpiles of explosives in Iraq, this President failed to guard those stockpiles." Mr Kerry added that terrorists could use the material to kill our troops, our people, blow up airplanes and level buildings". He added: "This is one of the great blunders of Iraq, one of the greatest blunders of this Administration, and the incredible incompetence of this President and this Administration has put our troops at risk and this country at greater risk." — **The Times**

sion machinery that could be used to make nuclear weapons had also vanished.

Although the explosives were categorised as conventional weapons, the IAEA supervised them as they could also be used to detonate a nuclear warhead. The loss of the explosives was revealed in a report by the US-installed Iraqi interim govern-

cars that have been used by the insurgents in Iraq are improvised out of looted artillery shells, mortar rounds and landmines, some suicide bombers have used high-grade explosives of the type that have gone astray.

AP adds: IAEA chief, Mohamed ElBaradei, was to report the disappearance to the Security Council later today.

Both HMX and RDX are key components in plastic explosives such as C-4 and Semtex, which are so powerful that Libyan terrorists needed just a 0.45 kilos to blow up Pan Am flight 103 over Lockerbie in 1988, killing 170 people.

Mr ElBaradei wanted to give coalition forces "some time" to recover the explosives before reporting their loss to the Security Council, the UN

spokesperson said. "But since it's now out, ElBaradei plans to inform the Security Council today." Diplomats said there was nothing to suggest that Mr ElBaradei had intended to hold off until after the 2 November election.

At the Pentagon, an official monitoring developments in Iraq said US-led coalition troops had searched Al-Qaqaa in the immediate aftermath of the March 2003 invasion and confirmed that the explosives, which had been under IAEA seal since 1991, were intact. Thereafter, the site was not secured by US forces, the official said.

IAEA inspectors last saw the explosives in January 2003 when they took an inventory and placed storage bunkers at Al-Qaqaa under agency seal.

50 Iraqi soldiers found shot dead

Associated Press
Baghdad, October 24

THE BODIES of about 50 Iraqi soldiers were found on a remote road in eastern Iraq, apparently the victims of an ambush as they were heading home on leave, Iraqi authorities said on Sunday.

Interior Ministry spokesman Adnan Abdul-Rahman said the victims were believed to have been killed about sundown on Saturday on a road about 95 miles east of Baghdad near the Iranian border.

There were conflicting reports on the exact number of dead, whether they were members of the Iraqi army or the Iraqi National Guard and whether they were all killed execution-style.

Iraqi government spokeswoman, Maha Malik, quoted witnesses here as saying insurgents fired rocket-propelled grenades at about two vehicles carrying the unarmed troops.

Gen. Walid al-Azzawi, commander of the Diyala provincial police, said the bodies were laid out in four rows each, with 12 bodies in each row. "After inspection, we found out that they were shot after being ordered to lay down on the earth," he said.

Al-Azzawi said he believed the soldiers had been training at the Kirkush military camp northeast of

W 17 25/10



People look at bodies of the killed recruits near Baquba on Sunday.

Baghdad. A reporter on the scene reported seeing the burned frames of two minibuses.

Bloodstains were visible on the ground, along with human remains. Witnesses said the attackers stole some buses. Police said they had found 51 bodies from the attack place.

A US military source in the region confirmed the in-

cident, but was uncertain of the number of dead.

Blast near US patrol

In the northern city of Mosul, a car bomb exploded near a US patrol, the military said. No casualties were reported. The car blew up when attackers fired a rocket-propelled grenade at a US patrol as the soldiers

checked reports the vehicle was rigged with explosives. No Americans were injured and no civilian casualties were immediately reported, Bowman said.

Elsewhere, the US military announced the arrest of what it said was a newly promoted senior leader in al-Zarqawi's movement during an early-morning raid near Fallujah. The person's name

was not released. His aides too were held. Relatives insisted the men had nothing to do with al-Zarqawi.

A videotape posted on Islamic Web sites showed Iraqi militants claiming to have beheaded a man who said he worked for the US military in Mosul for the past year. The killing was claimed by the Ansar al-Sunah Army.

Meanwhile, the husband of the kidnapped director of CARE International's operations in Iraq appealed for her release. Margaret Hassan, 59, who has British, Irish and Iraqi citizenship, was seized on Tuesday.

On Friday, she made an emotional televised plea to British Prime Minister Tony Blair to save her life by withdrawing his country's troops from Iraq.

On Saturday, her Iraqi husband, Tahseen Ali Hassan, begged for the kidnappers to free her "in the name of Islam."

Saddam trial: US snubbed

In a blow to the US, the UN has turned down its request to assist Iraqi judges and prosecutors trying ousted Iraqi president Saddam Hussein saying the special tribunal is empowered to impose death penalty, which the United Nation opposes, adds PTI.

UN spokesman Stephane Dujarric said Secretary General Kofi Annan maintains that "UN officials should not be directly involved in extending assistance to any court or tribunal that is empowered to impose the death penalty."

Also, "the Tribunal's rules fail to meet the minimum standards of justice," Dujarric was quoted as saying by the *Washington Post*.

Hostage cries for Blair help

G-9 22/10
W. 20/10 9:20
Dubai, Oct. 22 (Reuters): British-Iraqi hostage Margaret Hassan made an emotional appeal for British forces to withdraw from Iraq, in a videotape broadcast on Arabic television channel Al Jazeera today.

"Please help me, please help me," Hassan, who works for aid agency Care International, was shown saying while crying. "This might be my last hour."

The appeal came as British troops prepared to move nearer Baghdad ahead of an expected US-led offensive against rebels before January elections.

"Please, the British people, ask Mr Blair to take the troops out of Iraq and not to bring them here ... That's why people like Mr Bigley and myself are being caught," she said, referring to British hostage Kenneth Bigley, who was decapitated by his captors earlier this month.

"I don't want to die like Bigley," Irish-born Hassan appealed, before burying her head in her hands in tears.

Al Jazeera did not say how it obtained the tape, nor name the group holding Hassan, who has lived in Iraq for 30 years and also has Iraqi citizenship. She was kidnapped in Baghdad on Tuesday.

Care International is one of the world's largest independent global relief and development organisations and works in Iraq on primary health care and water projects.



A TV image of Margaret Hassan on Friday. (Reuters)

Dozens of foreigners have been kidnapped in Iraq. At least 32 have been killed.

Hassan is the eighth foreign woman to have been kidnapped in Iraq since April. The others, including two Italian aid workers held for three weeks in September, have been released.

The video surfaced the day after Britain announced it would move 850 troops from their relatively safe base in south Iraq to a more hostile area near Baghdad to relieve US troops.

British defence secretary Geoff Hoon said the redeployment requested by the US would last "weeks rather than months".

THE TELEGRAPH

23 OCT 2004

DELHI AND TEHERAN

Russia's Neighbours And Partners

By DMITRY KOSYREV

5.8 20/10

Russian foreign minister Sergei Lavrov visited India between 8 and 10 October and Iran on 10-11 October while his itinerary also included a stop in Kyrgyzstan. Understandably, this route is convenient from the geographical viewpoint. However, there is also a political aspect to it: there is a range of issues where the role of India and Iran is equally important to Russia. These are nuclear powers, engineering and energy resources, i.e., spheres where Russian business has indisputable advantages.

In fact, it is safe to say that while the word combination "Iran and the atom" sounds as ominous for the USA as the phrase "India and the atom" did in 1998 in the wake of Delhi's and Islamabad's nuclear tests, for Russia (and India), Iran is a close neighbour and welcome partner. This is the key idea running through "the energy triologue" of these states.

Nuclear power

Delhi and Teheran have problems, although they are different, with the international nuclear non-proliferation regime, which many powers are patently trying to connect with other countries' right to nuclear power engineering. This means Russia also has problems.

For Moscow, as it is working on nuclear power engineering contracts in both countries (Bushehr and Kudankulam), it is extremely important that Teheran, without any grudges, patiently and within the set time-limits — before 25 November — answers all the IAEA's remaining questions, as required by the latest resolution of this organisation's board of governors.

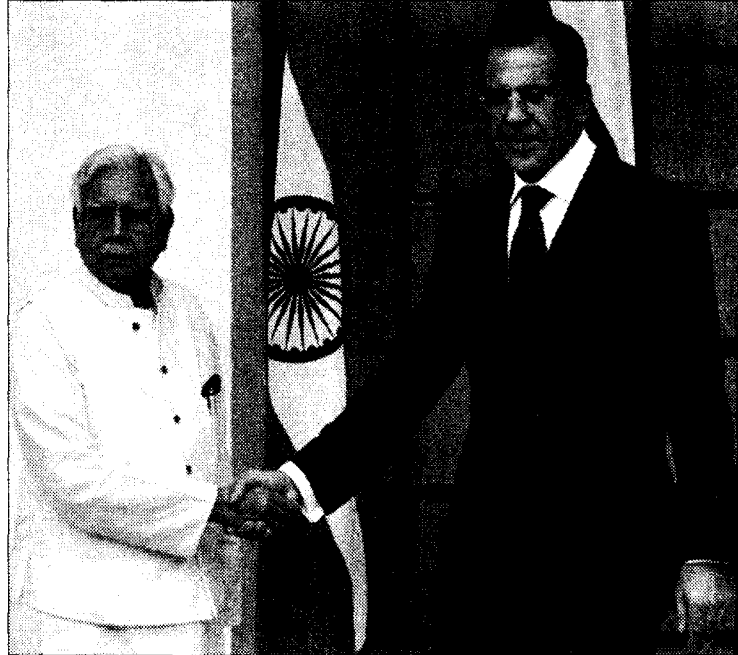
The author is a political analyst associated with Ria Novosti

This is important for Russia because its nuclear cooperation with Iran may only be based on the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, in particular, on Article 4, under which all nuclear states must give assistance to other states in developing nuclear power engineering.

Relations with India may not

build as many nuclear power stations as it likes in Iran, but none in India. And this is naturally a great shame.

A simple question arises: why doesn't Russia toss the fettering nuclear non-proliferation regime overboard? India and Pakistan highlighted its deficiencies by finding ways to de facto join



be based on this treaty, as it is not a signatory. However, Russia believes it necessary to comply with its obligations as part of the Nuclear Planning Group under which feedstock to states that are not signatories to the Non-Proliferation Treaty may only be supplied to maintain power stations' accident-proof work.

A shame

For this and several other technical considerations, Moscow may continue work on Kudankulam projects. However, if everything remains as it is, Moscow will have the right to

the nuclear club quite legally. Why not use our advantages in nuclear technologies, which are deliberately being blocked by rivals using international legal mechanisms?

We should not only do this because too many other countries want to follow the example of India and Pakistan. It is just that now there is a chance, together with the majority of the leading states, to change, almost without conflict, the whole obsolete non-proliferation regime. Several conferences and other meetings on this vital subject will be held in 2005. The USA, which is

concerned over a host of potential terror scenarios in this field, could meet India halfway in many respects. For its part, India could help its neighbour and partner Iran to integrate into international cooperation in this field, with Russia's full support.

Apart from that, Russia, Iran and India could jointly implement plans to develop Afghanistan, especially now that the political settlement process is over there, and many powers have nothing more to offer to Afghanistan, which will remain a poor state with an economy based on drug production.

Gas pipes

Lastly, Russia and Iran should play a special role in accelerating the economic development of the whole of South Asia. The point at issue is a project that the Russian leaders consider to be highly profitable and important: Gazprom's (Russia's leading gas company) potential participation in the organisation of natural gas supplies from Iran to India through a gas mainline.

This undoubtedly major contract is sure to bring great profits. However, it will hardly be possible to lay pipes along the bottom of the sea: hence, they must pass through Pakistan. This requires a new level of trust between Delhi and Islamabad, as pipes are a far more convincing proof of good intentions than any declaration.

Therefore, apart from India and Pakistan, two considerable regional powers — Iran and Russia — may turn out to be economically interested in the ongoing reconciliation process between the two old enemies. This also speaks volumes about their current and future roles in South Asia.

THE STATESMAN

20 OCT 2004

INSURGENCY IN IRAQ

59-8 19/10 No Light At The End Of The Tunnel w Aris (1)

The situation in Iraq is fast worsening. The US secretary of state, Collin Powell, has now admitted that a civil war in the country followed by its break-up in three parts on sectarian lines is a distinct possibility. A National Intelligence estimate on Iraq, which CIA gave the White House in July, points to a similar disturbing scenario.

Even 16 months after the war in Iraq, insurgency is spreading. Attacks on multinational forces continue unabated. The US defence department counted 87 attacks per day on US forces in August, the worst monthly average since May 2003. US forces are now being attacked across a wider area of Iraq than ever before.

More than 1,000 members of America's armed forces have been killed in Iraq since the invasion. The Iraqi civilian death rate, thought hard to estimate, has also risen sharply. At least 11,700 are thought to have died since the fall of Saddam Hussein.

Symbol of defiance

There is emergence of Atta-whid-wal-Jihad (unity and Holy war), a militant group linked to Abu-Mousad-al-Zarqawi, a Jordanian with al-Qaeda links. He has now become the most dreaded terrorist in Iraq and a symbol of defiance. Zarquawi's men were responsible for numerous terrorist attacks on Iraqi civilians and security forces as well as kidnappings of foreigners. They initially used Fallujah as their base of operations but now have consolidated their grip even in parts of Baghdad. On 14 September alone, the insurgents killed at least 59 Iraqis, including 47 in a car bombing outside a Baghdad police station. Lately, the insurgents are targeting Iraqi police.

A number of well-trained suicide attacks and ambushes on police and recruits had taken a heavy toll. Iraq's ministry of interior says more than 600 serving policemen have been killed in the past year, though the number may be even higher. Insurgents are also inducing police to change sides and planting moles inside the force.

Further, kidnapping of foreigners shows no sign of abating. Since April, at least 137 have been kidnapped of whom 28 have been killed, 29 are still being held, and 60 have been freed or have escaped. The status of the rest remains unknown.

The author is senior fellow at the Institute of Social Sciences, New Delhi and former director-general, Human Rights Commission

By SANKAR SEN

The radical Islamic group owing allegiance to al-Zarqawi recently beheaded two American civil contractors, who were kidnaped from an area in Baghdad, otherwise considered secure. It is reported that Zarqawi's willingness to sanction terrorist attacks indiscriminately against the civilians is creating splits am-

where insurgents' operations are mainly confined to acts of sabotage.

Further, a number of areas in Iraq are becoming insurgents' enclaves and "no-go areas" for the coalition forces. Lt. General Thomas Metz, the American overall commander in Iraq, admitted that the country has



ong various rebel groups. Nationalist guerrillas, as reported in *Time* (27 September 2004) are against the killing of innocent Iraqis and fear that insurgency is being taken over by well-funded foreign jihadis aligned to al-Qaeda.

US forces are now trying desperately to train the Iraqis for the thankless job of maintaining public order. They plan to raise the strength of security forces from 95,000 to 200,000 by next year. But the insurgents are also recruiting and their ranks are increasingly getting swelled. Defence secretary Donald Rumsfeld once referred to America's enemies in Iraq as "dead-enders" and the Pentagon then maintained that the number of insurgents would not exceed 5,000. And now it is conceded by Pentagon officials that there are dozens of regional cells that could mobilise as many as 20,000 fighters.

"No-go areas"

Another point is that, among the American forces, gunshot casualties have mounted sharply. Now ambushes are regularly taking place and the insurgents are taking up guns and risking fights with the foreign forces. Counter-insurgency experts describe this as a second phase of the insurgency, replacing the first phase known as the recruitment phase

three no-go areas — Sadr city, Fallujah and Samarra, a Sunni town, north of Baghdad. In the Sunni triangle cities of al Ramad, Baquba and Samarra, control seems to ebb and flow from week to week. The insurgents are following what the experts call "inkblot strategy" i.e. to take control of several towns and villages and expand outward till the areas merge. Not surprisingly, these no-go and tread-very-lightly zones offer bases for insurgent fighters including suicide bombers to prepare terror attacks on Iraqi and foreign civilians.

Again the Shia slums of Baghdad remain under the control of the turbulent cleric, Muqtada-al-Sadr and his militia. The interim government of Prime Minister Iyad Allawi has failed to subdue the fire-breathing cleric. His Madhi army has not handed over the weapons as demanded by the government.

Though many Iraqis disparage Sadr's movement and view his followers as a mob of jobless young men Sadr enjoys wide support in the vast north-eastern Shia slums of Baghdad. Sadr has demanded swift withdrawal of foreign forces and his followers are negotiating for the entire district to be declared a "no-go" area for the Americans.

Sadrists are of the view that elections are impossible under foreign occupation. The two es-

tablished Shia parties, the Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq and Dawa party, detest the Sadrists, but do not want a confrontation with them because of the rising popularity of Sadr.

In this deadly atmosphere it will be difficult to hold the promised parliamentary election in the month of January. The Prime Minister Iyad Allawi and American officials insist that the promised election is possible, though not everywhere in the country.

It will be difficult if not impossible to hold the elections in the "no-go" areas where even the police take orders from the insurgents. But the imponderable issue is the reaction of the radical Shia leader Muqtada-al-Sadr, if his followers are blocked from voting in the Shia slums north-east of Baghdad controlled by him.

At present he has agreed in principle to opt for party politics instead of armed insurgency but he may change his stance and switch to armed confrontation and make things difficult for the Americans and the interim government relying on the fire power of the US troops.

Short-lived joy

Though ordinary Iraqis hate the insurgents, they hold the Americans responsible for creating the whole mess. When three months ago, Iraqi troops and the multinational forces pulled out of Samarra, and the insurgents took over, the people celebrated in the streets. But their joy was short-lived. When the insurgents unleashed violence and destruction, they begged Allawi's government to send help.

The situation is further convoluted by the subtle role Iran is playing. US intelligence officials are of the view that Iran is extending covert support to al-Sadr. Iraq is of vital strategic interest to Teheran and it does not want massive American troops to remain so close at hand. Iran is thus defending itself in Iraq and hopes that Iraqi Shias who constitute the majority would gradually gravitate towards Iran.

The escalating violence in Iraq clearly shows that the US military is not trained or organised to fight insurgencies. In fighting insurgency in Iraq, America is now again paying the price. It thus seems that Iraq's troubles are unlikely to diminish. The American plan is to retake cities and pockets now under the control of the insurgents and install a credible civil administration before the election. At present that appears to be a difficult and daunting task.

Grim clues against Saddam unearthed

Reuters

Hatra (Iraq), October 13

INVESTIGATORS HAVE conducted their first scientific exhumation of Iraq's "killing fields", discovering hundreds of bodies which they hope will help convict Saddam Hussein of crimes against humanity.

They say nine trenches in a dry, dusty riverbed at the Hatra site in northern Iraq contain at least 300 bodies, and possibly thousands, including unborn babies and toddlers still clutching toys.

"It is my personal opinion that this is a killing field," said Greg Kehoe, a US lawyer appointed by the White House to work with the Iraqi Special Tribunal. "Someone used this field on significant occasions over time to take bodies up there, and to take people up there and execute them."

"I've been doing grave sites for a long time, but I've never seen anything like this, women and children executed for no apparent reason," added Kehoe, who spent five years in the Balkans. "It's a perfect place for execution."

The victims are believed to be minority Kurds killed during 1987-88. One trench contains only women and children, apparently killed

Hussein fit after hernia surgery

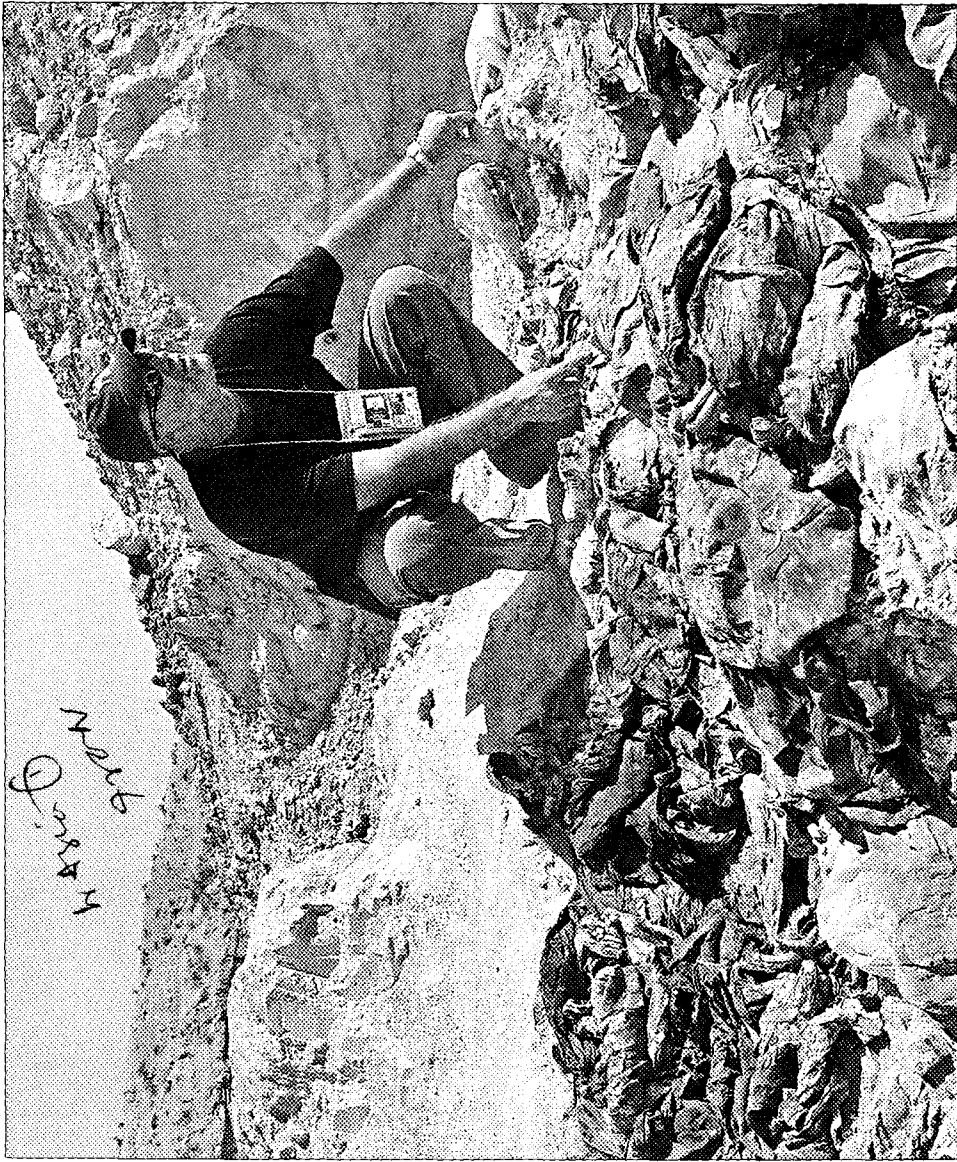
SADDAM HUSEIN underwent a hernia operation at a US-run hospital inside Baghdad's Green Zone two weeks ago and has made a full recovery, a US military official said on Wednesday. The former Iraqi President, who was captured by US forces on December 13 last year, had previously received treatment for hernia problems and had suffered discomfort in recent weeks. "They eradicated the problem and dealt with it. There were no complications and no concerns," said the military official, who asked not to be identified. "The

treatment definitely alleviated the problem. He felt a lot better afterwards," he said. Saddam returned to his cell shortly after the operation, which lasted a little over an hour. The operation took place at Ibn Sina hospital, once used by well-connected Iraqis under the former regime, but which is now known as the 31st Combat Support Hospital and receives wounded US soldiers from all over the country. Saddam, 67, was previously treated at Ibn Sina for kidney and hernia problems in July this year.

Reuters, Baghdad

makeshift morgue nearby. "The youngest foetus we have was 18 to 20 foetal weeks. Tiny bones, femurs, thighbones the size of a matchstick," says investigating anthropologist P. Willey, of California.

International organisations estimate more than 300,000 people died under Saddam's 24-year rule and Iraq's Human Rights ministry has identified 40 possible mass graves country-wide.



GRAVE MATTER Greg Kehoe, a US lawyer appointed by the White House to work with the Iraqi Special Tribunal, views a mass grave site being excavated in the northern Iraqi town of Hatra on Tuesday.

REUTERS

U.S., Iraqi forces raid Ramadi mosques

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from

BAGHDAD, Oct. 12. Iraqi forces backed by U.S. soldiers and Marines raided mosques on Tuesday in the resistance stronghold of Ramadi and detained a prominent cleric following fierce clashes that hospital officials said killed at least four persons.

U.S. aircraft also rocketed a mosque northwest of Ramadi on Monday after militants opened fire from there on U.S. Marines, the U.S. command said. Eleven mosques targeted in Ramadi are suspected of supporting militants through a range of activities, including harbouring them, storing illegal weapons caches, promoting violence and encouraging resistance recruitment, the command said.

'Cowboy behaviour'

Sheikh Abdul-Aleim Saadi, the provincial leader of the influential Association of Muslim Scholars, was detained at Mohammed Aref Mosque, his relatives and followers said.

Angry residents accused Americans of disrespecting the sanctity of city mosques. "This cowboy behaviour cannot be accepted," said cleric Abdullah Abu Omar of the Ramadi Mosque. "The Americans seem to have lost their senses and have gone out of control."

The 1st Marine Division said the raids followed a pattern of resistance activity in and around Ramadi mosques in recent weeks. "The 1st Marine Division respects the religious and cultural significance represent-

ed by mosques," it said in a statement. "However, when militants violate the sanctity of the mosque by using the structure for military purposes, the site loses its protective status."

The raids followed two days of clashes in the city, a Sunni militant stronghold 113 km west of Baghdad.

Turkish hostages freed

Meanwhile, Turkey's Foreign Minister confirmed on Tuesday in Ankara that 10 Turkish hostages had been freed by kidnapers in Iraq. He said the 10 employees of the Turkish construction company VINSAN were released and that their families were notified of their release.

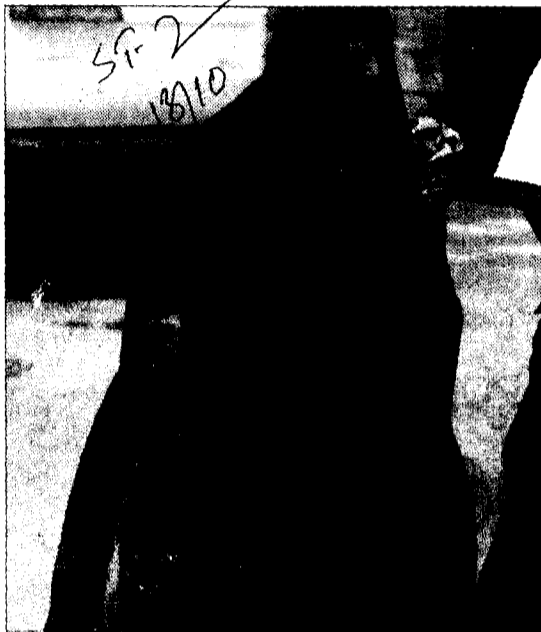
A Foreign Ministry official speaking on condition of anonymity, said the workers arrived in the Baghdad office of the VINSAN company on Tuesday morning and met Turkish Embassy officials. Al-Jazeera television had reported the release of the 10 hostages on Sunday but the announcement was the first confirmation that they were free.

Bigley's body found

The body of the British engineer Kenneth Bigley, killed by his kidnappers last week after three weeks in captivity, was dumped just south of Baghdad on Friday, sources close to the resistance said today. Bigley (62), was beheaded by followers of the Jordanian militant Abu Musab al-Zarqawi on Thursday.

— AP/Reuters

Equipment for making nukes missing in Iraq



An Iraqi woman carries a Barnau rifle to hand it over at a collection point in Sadr City in Baghdad on Tuesday. Radical cleric Moqtada Sadr's militiamen were handing their weapons in an initiative to end the revolt. — AFP

UNHO, Oct. 12. — In an alarming development, high-precision equipment and materials which could be used for making nuclear bombs have disappeared from some Iraqi facilities, the United Nations watchdog agency has said.

The equipment includes milling machines, turning machines and electron beam welders which, if in wrong hands, can be used for making deadly weapons for both military and civilian purposes.

"The disappearance of such equipment and material may be of proliferation significance, any State having information about the location of these items should inform the Vienna based International Atomic Energy Agency," IAEA said in a letter to the Security Council yesterday.

After Saddam Hussein was ousted, many Iraqi facilities were looted. Some materials, including

Turkish company not to pull out

BAGHDAD, Oct. 12. — The chairman of a Turkish construction company whose employees were released by kidnappers said today that his firm will not withdraw from Iraq because it was unclear whether the abductions were politically motivated.

Ten employees of the Turkish firm VINSAN were freed by their abductors and arrived at the Turkish embassy in Baghdad. All were said to be in good health. "We will not withdraw from Iraq," Mr Ali Haydar Veziroglu, VINSAN board chairman, said at his Baghdad office, citing uncertainty about whether the kidnappers were insurgents or criminals. — AP

missile engines, were found in junkyards of Iraq's neighbours. But IAEA said equipment and materials which are considered potentially useful in making a nuclear bomb have not been located.

IAEA has no inspectors on the ground and its assessment is apparently based on satellite imagery. The satellite imagery shows the entire buildings housing high precision equipment that could help a terror group in making nuclear bombs in a dismantled state. But diplomats say it is unclear whether the equipment has moved to new sites within Iraq or has been taken outside the country.

IAEA director-general Mohamed ElBaradei has said Iraq is expected to declare semi-annually changes that have occurred or are foreseen at sites deemed relevant by the agency. But since March 2003, it has received no such report. The imagery shows in many instances the entire building that housed high precision equipment being dismantled and equipment from the storage area removed, he said. — PTI

Security forces raid Ramadi

Iraqi forces backed by US soldiers and Marines raided mosques in the insurgent stronghold of Ramadi early today and detained a prominent cleric following fierce clashes that hospital officials said killed at least four people, AP adds from Ramadi.

পরমাণু-সরঞ্জাম সরানো হয়েছে ইরাক থেকে, বলল শক্তি সংস্থা

রাষ্ট্রপুঞ্জ, ১২ অক্টোবর: ইরাকের পরমাণু কেন্দ্র থেকে অস্ত্র তৈরিতে কাজে লাগানো যেতে পারে এমন সব সরঞ্জাম ও উপকরণ অন্যত্র সরিয়ে নিয়ে যাওয়া হয়েছে বলে জানাল আন্তর্জাতিক পরমাণু শক্তি সংস্থা (আই এ ই এ)। রাষ্ট্রপুঞ্জের পরমাণু নজরদারি কেন্দ্রের উপগ্রহে গোটা পরমাণু কেন্দ্র ভেঙে ফেলার ছবিও ধরা পড়েছে। আই এ ই এ-র প্রধান মহম্মদ এলবারাদেই বলেছেন, এই সব উপকরণ বেপাশ হওয়ার ফলে গোপনে পরমাণু অস্ত্র তৈরির সম্ভাবনা উড়িয়ে দেওয়া যায় না। রাষ্ট্রপুঞ্জের নিরাপত্তা পরিষদকে চিঠি দিয়ে এই আশঙ্কার কথা জানিয়ে দিয়েছেন তিনি। চিঠিতে এলবারাদেই বলেছেন, যে ভাবে পরমাণু কেন্দ্র ভেঙে ফেলা হয়েছে ও সরঞ্জাম সরানো হয়েছে, তাতে গোটা বিষয়টার পিছনে পরিকল্পনার ছাপ স্পষ্ট।

ইরাক অবশ্য এই ঘটনাকে এতটা গুরুত্ব দিতে নারাজ। অন্তর্বর্তী সরকারের প্রযুক্তিমন্ত্রী রশিদ ওমর বলেছেন, ইরাকে মার্কিন হানার অব্যবহিত পরেই লুঠেরারা পরমাণু কেন্দ্রে চড়াও হয়ে উপকরণ নিয়ে যায়। তার পর থেকে কেন্দ্রটি নিরাপদই

আছে। এক পক্ষের মতে অবশ্য আমেরিকাই ইরাকের পরমাণু কেন্দ্র ভেঙে ফেলেছে। কিন্তু হোয়াইট হাউসের তরফে এ কথার সত্যতা এখনও স্বীকার করা হয়নি। ওমরও বলেছেন, তুয়াইথামে ইরাকের মূল পরমাণু কেন্দ্রের কোনও বাড়ি ভেঙে ফেলা হয়েছে এমন খবর তাঁর জানা নেই। আই এ ই এ-র কর্তাদের যখন খুশি ইরাকে এসে পরীক্ষা চালানোর আমন্ত্রণ জানিয়েছেন তিনি। এ দিকে, ব্রিটিশ বিদেশসচিব জ্যাক স্ট্র গোটা ঘটনার তদন্তের নির্দেশ দিয়েছেন।

আই এ ই এ-র রিপোর্ট অনুযায়ী, নিখোঁজ উপকরণের মধ্যে মিলিং মেশিন ও ইলেকট্রন বিম ওয়েন্ডার আছে। খোঁজ মিলছে না উচ্চক্ষমতাসম্পন্ন অ্যালুমিনিয়ামেরও। এই সব সরঞ্জামের অনেক কিছুই ছিট হিসাবে বেচে দেওয়া হয়েছে পশ্চিম এশিয়া, ইউরোপে। এমনকী রকেট ইঞ্জিন প্রযুক্তি পর্যন্ত বিদেশে বিক্রি হয়েছে বলেও জানিয়েছে তারা।

তবে পরমাণু বোমা তৈরিতে কাজে লাগে এমন কোনও সরঞ্জাম পাচার হয়েছে বলে তাদের কাছে সুনির্দিষ্ট তথ্য নেই। এ ব্যাপারে কোনও খবর থাকলে পরমাণু শক্তি সংস্থাকে জানানোর জন্য

রাষ্ট্রপুঞ্জের সদস্য দেশগুলিকে অনুরোধ করেছেন তিনি। এ বছরের গোড়ায় ইরাক থেকে প্রায় দু'টন নিম্ন মানের ইউরেনিয়াম সরিয়ে নিয়ে গিয়েছিল আমেরিকা। তার পরেও তুয়াইথামে ৫৫০ টন পরমাণু উপকরণ থেকে গিয়েছে বলে জানাচ্ছে আই এ ই এ।

শক্তি সংস্থার রিপোর্ট সম্পর্কে ইরাকের অন্তর্বর্তী কাউন্সিলের এক কূটনীতিকের বক্তব্য, “আমরা কিছুই জানিনা। খবর নেওয়ার চেষ্টা করছি।”

বাগদাদের খবর, জঙ্গিদের হাতে নিহত ব্রিটিশ পণবন্দি কেনেথ বিগলের দেহ বাগদাদের কাছে ফেলে যাওয়া হয়েছে। তবে লন্ডনে ব্রিটিশ বিদেশ দফতর বলেছে, তারা বিগলের দেহ পায়নি। বাগদাদে ব্রিটিশ দূতাবাসও এ সম্পর্কে কিছু জানে না।

ফালুজায় মার্কিন বিমান হানায় গুঁড়িয়ে গিয়েছে একটি নামী রেস্টোরাঁ, মারা গিয়েছেন দু'জন নিরাপত্তা রক্ষী। আবু মাসাব আল-জারকোয়াইয়ের সাক্ষোপাঙ্গদের নিকেশ করতে অভিযান চালানো হয় বলে মার্কিন সেনা দাবি করেছে। এ দিকে, সংঘর্ষে উত্তপ্ত পশ্চিম আনবার থেকে মার্কিন বাহিনী সুম্মি ধর্মীয় নেতা আবেল আলিম আল-সাদিকে গ্রেফতার করেছে। — রয়টার্স

Iran defies UN, gets nuke-ready

Reuters
Vienna, October 6

IRAN SAID on Wednesday it had processed several tons of raw "yellowcake" uranium to prepare it for enrichment — a process that can be used to make atomic weapons — in defiance of the UN nuclear watchdog.

Iran's President said Tehran would not give in to foreign pressure aimed at stopping what he said was a peaceful nuclear energy programme, but which the US says is a covert scheme aimed at building bombs.

A spokeswoman for the UN International Atomic En-

ergy Agency (IAEA) said the uranium processing was being closely monitored by the IAEA to ensure that nothing would be diverted for weapons purposes. "The uranium conversion is being conducted under the supervision of the IAEA," spokeswoman Melissa Fleming said.

It was unclear how much processed uranium had been produced so far, though Iran's chief delegate to the IAEA, Hossein Mousavian, indicated the amount was not large. "It is an experimental process and we have not entered the industrial phase," Mousavian said.

"A few tons of the 37 tons

of yellowcake have been converted under the full supervision of the IAEA and completely within the framework of its safeguards," he said.

Iran's uranium conversion plant at Isfahan intends to process a total of 37 tons of yellowcake, which experts say could be enriched into material for up to five atomic weapons.

The IAEA has installed monitoring cameras at Isfahan to oversee the production of uranium hexafluoride, the feed material for centrifuges used in enrichment. "They (the IAEA) were aware that the production had begun," a diplomat

close to the IAEA said.

The diplomat said the production began around 10 days ago.

Mousavian said the oversight was intense, with the agency making certain that "each milligram of the used yellowcake (is) under the IAEA's watch and supervision." Tehran had originally promised France, Germany and Britain in October 2003 that it would suspend its entire enrichment programme and all related activities. While it has yet to enrich any uranium, Iran never entirely froze the program and recently resumed key parts of it.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES
17 OCT 2004

Iran hikes missile range

RF-13 610 W. King D. Gray

Targets 2,000 km away can be hit in a moment

Agence France-Presse
Tehran, October 5

IRAN NOW has ballistic missiles with a range of 2,000 km, powerful former President Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani said.

"Today, we have the power to send our missiles up to 2,000 km, and experts know that once a country has made such a step, all further steps are accessible," Rafsanjani was quoted by the state news agency IRNA as saying at a conference on "Space and National Security".

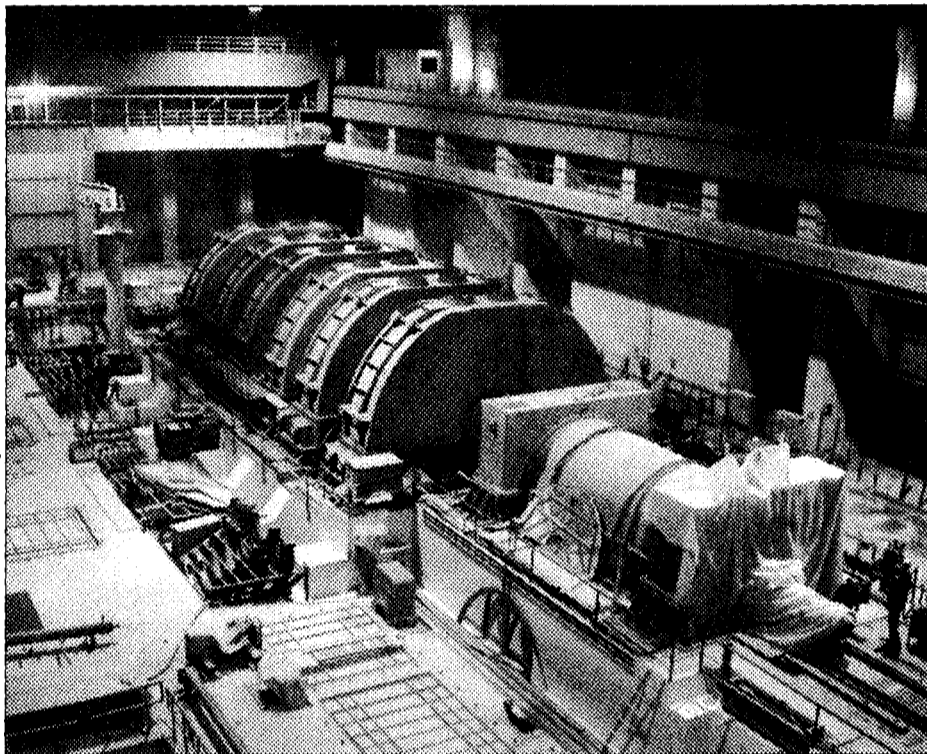
Steady progress made by Iran's ballistic missile programme is a source of concern to the international community, adding to worries about the country's nuclear activities, which Tehran insists are peaceful.

On August 11, Iran tested an upgraded version of its Shahab-3 missile. Previous figures had put the missile's range at between 1,300 and 1,700 km, already bringing arch-enemy Israel well within range.

Following the latest test, Israeli news reports put the range of the new Shahab-3 — believed to be based on a North Korean design — at 2,000 km. "We have today the ballistic technology and if we had not limited our progress, we would have been even more advanced," Rafsanjani said.

"With this ballistic power, we can today speak of an independent satellite launch and we should seek the technology to make our own satellites," he added, saying Iran "was at the door of the club of country's having satellite technology".

During a military parade last month, Iran showed off its range of ballistic missiles draped in banners vowing to "crush America" and "wipe



BALLISTIC DEVELOPMENT A nuclear facility in Iran.

No chance of Tehran nuke bargain, says US

THE UNITED States sees no reason to offer Iran incentives to ensure its nuclear programme remains peaceful, a US government official said on Tuesday. European states want the US to make such proposals to Tehran after the November 2 US presidential election to add weight to efforts

by Britain, France and Germany to reach an accord with Iran and avoid a UN Security Council showdown. "At this point a grand bargain is not where we are heading," said the official. He was referring to suggestions that Washington offer Iran economic and political inducements to halt activi-

ties which Washington suspects are aimed at making the atom bomb. "We haven't seen any Iranian recognition that (a bargain) is in their interest," the official, in Brussels for talks with EU and Canadian officials on managing the challenge of Iran, said.

Reuters, Brussels

Israel off the map". "The Shahab-3 missiles, with different ranges, enables us to destroy the most distant targets," said an official commentary accompanying the parade.

While the country has announced it has upgraded the Shahab-3, it has denied it is

working on a Shahab-4 — a device that would involve a two-stage propulsion system and bring European capitals within range.

But last week the government said it was being deliberately ambiguous over its missile capability, cur-

rently a topic of intense speculation following fresh tests and the introduction of a "strategic" device. Iran says the Shahab-3 is simply a deterrent, while Israel charges that the Islamic state could have a nuclear warhead by 2007.

23 PALESTINIANS, 3 ISRAELIS KILLED IN GAZA.

First Israeli incursion



A blood splattered area in Sderot where a Hamas rocket killed two Israeli children. — AFP

Associated Press

JEBALIYA REFUGEE CAMP (Gaza), Sept. 30. — For the first time in four years of fighting, Israeli troops pushed deep into the largest Palestinian refugee camp today after a Palestinian rocket killed two preschoolers in an Israeli border town.

Twenty-three Palestinians were killed by army fire and at least 108 wounded, the highest single-day Palestinian casualty count in 30 months. Three Israelis — two soldiers and a woman jogging in a Jewish settlement — were killed by Palestinians.

Also today, Israel's defence minister decided after consultations with army commanders to

widen the military campaign and send more troops to Gaza, a security official said on condition of anonymity. The plan for a large-scale operation was to be presented to Prime Minister Mr Ariel Sharon and his inner Cabinet later in the day.

The heaviest fighting today raged in the Jebaliya refugee camp, just north of Gaza City. The Israeli raid began this morning with armoured vehicles driving into the camp of more than 100,000 under cover of heavy machine gun fire.

Dozens of masked Palestinian gunmen fired at the tanks, and hundreds of residents rushed into the streets, many throwing stones. Some of the gunmen were seen laying booby traps, while several

children tried to climb onto tanks.

In the deadliest incident, an Israeli tank fired a shell toward a group of Palestinian gunmen, killing at least seven people and wounding 23, many of them critically with loss of limbs. Israeli bulldozers also demolished 22 homes along a relatively narrow road leading into the camp, UN aid officials said, apparently to widen it and allow more tanks to get through.

Yesterday, Hamas militants had fired a rocket at the Israeli border town of Sderot despite the massive army presence in Gaza, killing two children, ages two and four, as they played on a sidewalk at the start of the Jewish holiday of Sukkot.

Kids bleed on Baghdad streets

35 children taking sweets from US troops killed

Reuters
Baghdad, September 30

INSURGENTS HAVE detonated three car bombs near a US military convoy in Baghdad, killing 46 people, 35 of them children who were rushing to collect sweets from American troops. At least 208 were wounded.

In two other attacks, a suicide bomber blew up his vehicle near a US checkpoint outside the capital, killing two policemen and a US soldier, and a car bomb killed four people in the restive northern Iraq town of Tal Afar.

The Baghdad bombs went off as crowds gathered to celebrate the opening of a new sewage plant. It was not clear if the event or the US convoy passing by was the target. The first explosion was followed by two more that struck those who rushed to help the initial victims, residents said.

Ten US soldiers were wounded in the attack, two of them seriously, the military said. Iraq's Health Ministry confirmed 41 dead and 139 wounded, the vast majority children.

Prime Minister Iyad Allawi, speaking in London, condemned the violence and pledged the election would go ahead on time.

No negotiation on Bigley, says Straw

BRITAIN WILL not pay a ransom or meet any political demands to secure the release of British hostage Kenneth Bigley in Iraq, Foreign Secretary Jack Straw said on Thursday. "Of course it's very difficult for the Bigley family," Straw said. But he added: "If we did not have this position there would be many, many more people who would be kidnapped, and the world would be less safe." "We cannot negotiate ... In the sense of negotiating about the payment of ransoms or meeting any political demands," Straw said.

AP, London

Doctors at Yarmouk hospital struggled to treat the flood of victims, as pools of blood formed on the floor. One boy lay swathed in bandages on a stretcher; his severed leg on a table beside him. Others were scarred by shrapnel, their clothes blown off by

the force of the explosion. The attack gouged a crater in the road and wrecked a dozen burnt-out cars and a bus. US troops sealed off the area with tanks, and helicopters circled overhead.

Hours earlier, a suicide bomber had killed two Iraqi police and a US soldier by blowing up his car near a US checkpoint at a crowded intersection in Abu Ghraib, just west of Baghdad. Around 60 people, including women and children, were wounded. Another soldier was killed when a rocket hit a US logistics base near Baghdad. The confirmed deaths of the two soldiers raised to at least 802 the number of US troops killed in action since the start of the war.

More hostages taken

An Iraqi militant group said it had kidnapped 10 people, including two Indonesian women, who work for an electronics firm, Al Jazeera reported on Thursday. The Arab news network aired a videotape from the "Islamic Army in Iraq, the western leadership" showing three men held captive. It said the other hostages were six Iraqis and two Lebanese nationals, but that the group made no demands.

Iraq war: Blair joins issue with Annan

By Rashmee Z Ahmed/TNN

London: In an unprecedented diplomatic deadlock, Tony Blair has disputed UN secretary general Kofi Annan's claim that the Iraqi invasion was "illegal" and insisted it was justified on the basis of broken UN resolutions.

Annan was offering a point of view, Blair assured his doubting nation in a lengthy, early-morning BBC domestic radio interview.

The UN secretary general recently said the Iraq war was not legal because Britain and the US had failed to secure a second UN resolution authorising military action.

But in a brusque put down seen by many as a sign the Iraq impasse was increasingly wearying to the embattled prime minister, Blair said: "That is his

view—it is not our view."

"The view we took at the time and we take it now is that the war was justified legally because he (Saddam Hussein) remained in breach of UN resolutions."

Blair's remarks came just hours before an appalled Britain was forced to

watch television footage of a caged and chained fellow-citizen Ken Bigley, who is currently being held hostage in Baghdad.

Bigley's captors are a hardline group led by the Jordanian Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. The new broadcast, issued by captors of the 62-year-old engineer, includes Bigley's rough and ready castigation of Blair as a "liar", who was doing little to free him.

The British hostage issue is seen to have increasingly polarized British public opinion about the war and its chaotic aftermath.



THE IRISH TIMES 1 OCT 2004

Jerusalem's Ayodhya

TO Jews it is the Temple Mount where the biblical King Solomon built a temple to his God. To Muslims it is Haram al-Sharif, the noble sanctuary from which Prophet Mohammed ascended to Allah. The 35-acre paved platform is, you might say, Jerusalem's Ayodhya, a holy site rooted in the founding myths of two warring faiths. And it is elbowing its way back into the news.

Israel is threatening to restrict the number of Muslims allowed to enter the Haram, the third holiest shrine in Islam, during Ramadan to avert a potential disaster. They contend that excavations over the past eight years to convert an underground chamber, known as Solomon's Stables, into a huge mosque have undermined the platform and could cause parts of the high retaining wall to tumble into the valley below. With up to 2,000,000 worshippers expected to attend Friday prayers during Ramadan, which begins in mid-October, it could turn into a catastrophe. The structure was weakened further by an earthquake last February.

After appeals to the Waqf, the Islamic trust that administers the Haram, fell on deaf ears, Israel is urging King Abdullah of Jordan to intervene. Commander Ilan Franco, Jerusalem police chief, visited Amman last week to lobby the royal court. Jordan, the traditional custodian of Muslim holy places in Jerusalem, pays the Waqf's operating budget and salaries, although the Palestinian Authority appointed the mufti, the chief cleric.

Israel wants to block access to the roof of Solomon's Stables, which the Muslims now call the Marwani Mosque, and to the eastern end of the 4,000 sq m chamber itself, where Israel says supporting arches have been weakened.

Jon Seligman, the Jerusalem regional archaeologist in the Israeli Antiquities Authority, said: "There is an imminent danger to the structure, especially if large numbers of people are on top of it. In the worst scenario, part of the wall could fall down."

Gideon Ezra, internal security minister, told Israel Radio this week: "We won't have any choice but reduce the number of worshippers during Ramadan." He insisted, however, that Israel did not intend to prevent Muslims from praying there. If certain areas were blocked off to Israel's satisfaction, he said, more worshippers would be allowed in.

Although the mount remained under Muslim administration after Israel conquered East Jerusalem in the 1967 war, Israel claims overall control. Its police maintain a permanent post inside the disputed compound and check worshippers as they enter.

Issam Awad, Waqf's chief engineer, dismissed Israeli concerns as "unjustifiable and exaggerated." Egyptian engineers studied the structural problem six months ago, he said, and the Waqf was now doing the necessary repairs under Jordanian supervision. "The Marwani mosque, with a capacity of 4,000 worshippers, is safe for prayers," he insisted.

Religion is politics and politics religion at the holy site of the Temple Mount also known as Haram al-Sharif. ERIC SILVER on the controversy over a piece of land freighted with history and legend



Despite their name, the stables date back to King Herod's reconstruction of the Jewish Temple in the first century BC. The Romans destroyed them in 70 AD, but they were rebuilt by Jerusalem's first Muslim rulers in the early Middle Ages and taken over as stores and stables by the Crusaders.

Nowhere on earth is so freighted with history and legend. Solomon and Herod built their temples on the mount, identified by Jewish tradition as Mount Moriah, where Abraham bound Isaac for sacrifice and David built an altar on the threshing floor of Arauna the Jebusite.

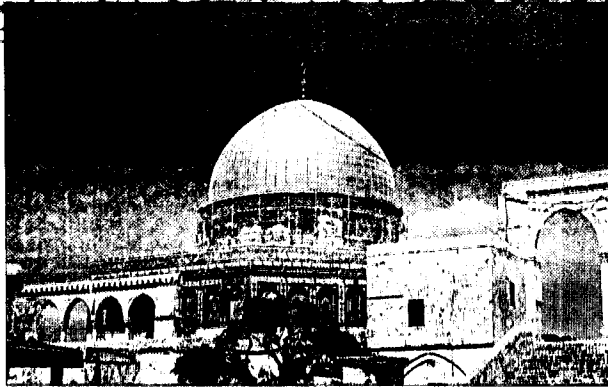
According to the Gospels, it was here that the boy Jesus disputed with the doctors, here that he drove out the moneychangers, here that he absolved the woman taken in adultery.

The Muslims call the mount Haram al-Sharif, the Noble Sanctuary, identified as the "Farther Temple" to which Mohammed made his miraculous Night Journey from Mecca and thence to the Throne of Allah accompanied by the Angel Gabriel.

The Romans destroyed the Jewish Temple in 70 AD. Caliph Omar, who conquered Jerusalem for Islam in 638, built the first mosque on the mount. Later, Muslim rulers erected the magnificent Dome of the Rock and Al Aqsa mosques, converted to churches by the Crusaders in 1099.

Since Saladin wrested it back for Islam in 1187, the mount has remained under zealous Muslim control through centuries of Arab, Turkish, British, Jordanian and Israeli rule. The Israelis honoured the status quo rather than provoke a holy war with the entire Muslim world.

In 1967, defence minister Moshe Dayan ordered his troops to take down the Star of David flag they had raised over the Dome. General Uzi Narkiss, their commander, rejected a suggestion by the army chief rabbi of the day, Shlomo Goren, to demolish the mosques and rebuild the Temple. But a radi-



cal "Jewish underground" group plotted to blow them up in the early Eighties. A high-profile visit in September 2000 by Ariel Sharon, then leader of the Opposition, lit the fuse of the intifada.

The author, Arthur Koestler, who lodged five minutes away from the mount as a foreign correspondent in the Twenties, said he had "never lived at such close quarters with divinity, and never further removed from it." Not much has changed. In this thrice-holy city, religion is politics, politics is religion, and both play dirty.

The Marwani Mosque is open only for Friday prayers during Ramadan. Infidels - Jews, Christians and others - are kept out, though they can tour the mount itself when the Muslims are not at prayer.

Muslim volunteers laid floor tiles and carpets, plastered the massive columns, installed electric lights and loudspeakers, which relay sermons from Al Aqsa. A manger, carved in stone, is the sole remaining relic of the Templars.

To clear steps down into the stables-mosque, the Muslim authorities brought in a bulldozer and dug a 1,500 sq m hole 11 m deep, then laid a concrete slab on top of the chamber. Israeli engineers complain that the excavation and the slab between them changed the pressure on the pillars and vaults below, destabilising the retaining wall of the mount. Cracks had already been detected in the eastern wall, facing the Mount of Olives, but the Israelis say the

building work accelerated the problem.

The Waqf, which insists that it alone is responsible for the repairs, suspects that Israel's real motive is to assert an historic claim to the mount. Yasser Arafat and lesser Palestinian spokesmen consistently deny that there ever was a Jewish temple there.

"They say the Jews have an equal interest with the Muslims," said Issam Awad. "We reject these claims. Dividing the mount will ignite a reli-

gious war if we make any concessions making Israel partners. They claim that the Haram al-Sharif is only the buildings of Al Aqsa and the Dome of the Rock, but we consider the whole compound as holy to us. They are always trying to interfere."

Muslim suspicions were fanned during the abortive Camp David negotiations in 2000, when it was proposed that a Palestinian state would exercise sovereignty above the mount and Israel below.

For their part, the Israelis don't trust the Palestinians either. The Waqf refused to let Israeli archaeologists inspect its excavations. Some have accused them of systematically destroying the Jewish links. No professional dig has ever been carried out on top of the mount.

Jon Seligman, the Israeli regional archaeologist, accused the Palestinians of an archaeological crime. "If you come with a bulldozer," he argued, "you're causing irreparable damage, you're destroying an entire layer of the archaeological history of the site."

The Muslim contractor dumped the rubble from Solomon's Stables in the nearby Kidron Valley. Sifting through it, Israeli archaeologists found stones and pottery from every era, but nothing yet of major significance. "Mainly," said Seligman, savouring the irony, "they seem to have destroyed a Muslim layer."

(The author is the Jerusalem-based West Asia Correspondent of The Statesman.)

Iraqi insurgents attack national guard targets

Associated Press
Baghdad, September 27

INSURGENTS KILLED at least eight Iraqi National Guard members in attacks in Mosul and near the cities of Baqouba and Fallujah, US and Iraqi officials said.

Near the Sunni Muslim stronghold of Fallujah, west of Baghdad, a suicide car bombing killed four members of the Iraqi National Guard at a checkpoint manned by US and Iraqi forces, Iraqi police said.

Near Baqouba, outside the town of Moqtadiye, a roadside bombing left an Iraqi National Guard soldier dead, US military sources said. In the northern city of Mosul, a car bombing killed three Iraqi National Guard members and wounded seven other people, including three guard members and four civilians, according to Maj. Gen. Salim al Haj Issa, head of security of Nineveh Province.

As insurgents attacked

Kidnapped Iranian diplomat freed

A KIDNAPPED Iranian diplomat was released on Monday after more than a month in captivity, the Iranian Embassy said.

Fereidoun Jahani, an official at the Iranian consulate in Karbala, was seized while travelling between Baghdad and Karbala in early August. He arrived at the embassy in good health on Monday afternoon, said Abbas Attar, director of the Iranian ambassador's office in Baghdad. Attar said the captors

national guard targets, US military aircraft struck in the Baghdad neighborhood of Sadr City on Monday, killing five people and wounding 46 others, including nine children and 15 women, according to the director of Imam Ali hospital.

The US military said the strikes in Sadr City, a hotbed of insurgents loyal to renegade Shia cleric Muqtada al-Sadr, struck several "positively identified" militant hideouts.

Residents said explosions lit up the night sky for

hours before dawn. Mangled vehicles, debris and shards of glass littered the streets.

Dr Qassem Saddam of the Imam Ali hospital in Sadr City said five people were killed and 40 were wounded — including 15 women and nine children. At least two children wrapped in bloodstains bandages could be seen lying in hospital beds and one man suffered burns from head-to-toe.

England court martial

The commander of the 18th Airborne Corps on Monday referred Pfc. Lynndie England to trial by general court martial, the corps announced. England faces 19 charges, including conspiracy and assault, in connection with the mistreatment of prisoners at the Abu Ghraib prison on the outskirts of Baghdad. England was arraigned on Friday, where she deferred entering a plea, according to the statement.

US-Syrian talks

A high-level US military delegation has arrived in Damascus for rare face-to-face talks with Syrian government officials to discuss possible areas of cooperation in securing the Iraqi-Syrian border, Iraqi and American military officials said on Monday.

Other developments:

US Secretary of State Colin Powell said the US military will move into insurgent-heavy "no-go zones" in Iraq to clear the way for legitimate elections in January. Jordan's King Abdullah II said he believed two Italian women kidnapped in Iraq three weeks ago were still alive and Jordan was trying to obtain their freedom. "With the help of intelligence services we are seeking to locate them and obtain their release," he told *Corriere della Sera* newspaper.



OK BEHEADING Iraqi cartoonist Muayed Naima, like other artists, intellectuals and writers, worked within tight constraints under Saddam. But since Saddam was toppled, he has found new pressure from Islamist militants who have threatened him because his work mocks violence. But he was not put off. In this cartoon by Naima, a militant measures the neck of a bound captive and chooses a knife with which to behead him.

Collision course

h. b. m.
09-20 **Teheran defies the UN** *5-8*
20/9

Teheran's outright rejection of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) requiring it to freeze uranium enrichment, coupled with Washington's decision to sell Israel 500 "bunker buster" bombs that can destroy hardened underground bunkers, is guaranteed to raise temperatures in the region. The principal actors are on a collision course. Teheran had promised its EU interlocutors last October that it would stop enriching uranium in exchange for improved economic and diplomatic ties, but it now appears to be backing out of that promise and taking on the UN, which could trigger sanctions against it. But Teheran has warned that sanctions would lead to its pulling out of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty altogether, which would leave it free to develop nuclear bombs. For Tel Aviv the nightmare scenario must be Teheran developing nuclear weapons and passing on a few of them to, say, Hamas.

Given that Iraq is already sliding into anarchy, that would be tantamount to throwing a lighted matchstick into the already volatile Mideast cauldron. Sanctions and a possible Israeli attack would have one of two consequences in Iran. The mullahs have mismanaged Iran's economy leading to large-scale unemployment. On top of that they have recently concentrated power in their own hands by driving out the liberals from Parliament. If sanctions cause widespread suffering, the mullahs may well get the blame for impoverishment in the midst of oil riches. More likely, however, is what happened in Iraq — attacks from outside would cause a nationalistic reaction. The mullahs will be strengthened, and liberal currents in Iranian society drowned out. Radically different approaches, based on consensus rather than force, will have to be tried if the spread of nuclear weapons is to be prevented.

THE STATESMAN

29 SEP 2001

Allawi rules out releasing women

By Atul Aneja

MANAMA, SEPT. 23. Reinforcing a decision taken by the United States, Iraq's interim Prime Minister, Iyad Allawi, has rejected the demand by an Iraqi militant group holding a British citizen captive to release women prisoners in Iraqi jails.

Execution threat

Mr. Allawi's decision has heightened the possibility of Kenneth Bigley facing execution by the Tawhid wal Jihad group. Led by the Jordanian militant Abu Musab al Zarqawi, the Tawhid wal Jihad has already beheaded two Americans, out of the three individuals that it had abducted. Video footage re-

leased on Monday showed American Eugene Armstrong being decapitated by a masked man, who the CIA has identified as Mr. Zarqawi. A second American, Jack Hensley, was killed 24 hours later. A video allegedly showing his killing was posted on Wednesday evening after his body was found. In a statement, Mr. Allawi said "there is no question of the Iraqi Government ... changing these decisions in the light of the demands of a terrorist group which has taken three hostages and criminally and barbarically murdered two of them."

'U.S. sabotaged release'

Paul Bigley, the brother of the kidnapped Briton reacted with

dismay at Mr. Allawi's ^{W B W 0 9} statement, blaming Washington of having 'sabotaged' the possibility of a safe release.

"A judge [in Iraq] has made a legal decision to release three people, one female and two males. The Minister of Justice has endorsed this [and] published this on international news. Now this has been sabotaged," Mr. Bigley told a British radio station.

British hostage's plea

On Wednesday, a poor quality video posted on the internet showed a sobbing Mr. Kenneth Bigley making an emotional appeal to British Prime Minister Tony Blair to save his life: "I need you [Blair] to be compas-

Another American beheaded

Associated Press

BAGHDAD, Sept. 22. — Iraqi officials recovered a decapitated corpse in western Baghdad today and turned it over to US officials, who were investigating if it was the body of Jack Hensley — the second American hostage purportedly killed by Al-Qaida-linked militants in the past few days.

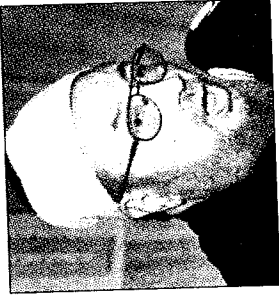
The grisly discovery came as Iraq's justice ministry promised to release one of two high-profile women prisoners. Officials denied the decision was linked to demands by militants who claimed responsibility for the two American deaths — and are threatening to execute a Briton unless all jailed Muslim women are freed.

The body was found with its severed head in a black plastic bag in Baghdad's Amiriya neighbourhood, an interior ministry official said. The US embassy confirmed that a headless body was handed over to American authorities, but could not immediately identify it.

Tawhid and Jihad, led by terror mastermind Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, yesterday claimed to have killed Hensley, saying their demands had not been met. "The nation's zealous sons slaughtered the second American hostage after the end of the deadline," a statement by the outfit said yesterday. It was posted on an Islamic website and could not immediately be verified.

Late last night, an expanded version of the statement announcing Hensley's death appeared on a differ-

'Cleric's fatwa led to murders'



Yusef al-Qaradawi: Fatwa to kill Americans. — AFP

ABU DHABI, Sept. 22. — The two US hostages were murdered in Iraq in "direct response" to a fatwa issued by prominent Muslim cleric Yusef al-Qaradawi, who should be sued by the victims' families, a newspaper said today.

"In a tragic and horrific scene, the killers slaughtered the two American hostages in a repulsive way," *Al-Iftih* newspaper said, in reference to the beheading this week of Eugene "Jack" Armstrong and Jack Hensley by the Al-Qaida-linked Tawhid and Jihad outfit.

"This outrageous act is a direct response to Qaradawi's fatwa and incitement which permits the killing of American civilians," the daily said. Egyptian-born Qaradawi, who is based in Qatar, has called on Muslims to fight all Americans in Iraq, even civilians, one of his top aides said in Cairo early this month. — AFP

ent Islamic website and warned that British hostage Kenneth Bigley (62) would be the next to die unless all Iraqi women are released from jail.

Meanwhile, US aircraft and tanks attacked rebel positions in Baghdad's Sadr City slum, killing 10 people and wounding 92.



MOUNTING TOLL: Iraqis evacuate a body from the site of a suicide car bomb attack in Baghdad on Wednesday. Six people were killed and 54 wounded in the blast outside a photocopying shop in a western Baghdad neighbourhood. — AFP

'Iraq to free Dr Germ'

BAGHDAD, Sept. 22. — Iraq's justice ministry promised to release one of the two high-profile Iraqi women prisoners held in US custody on bail today. Dr Rihab Rashid Taha, a scientist who became known as "Dr Germ" for helping Iraq make weapons out of anthrax, and Ms Huda Salih Mahdi Ammash, a biotech researcher known as "Mrs Anthrax" are the only two Iraqi women held in American custody, according to the US military.

A justice ministry official said the decision had been made by Iraqi and coalition authorities, and officials were also considering whether to also release Ms Ammash.

However, the US embassy here said the two women will not be released immediately. — AP

The worst is yet to come... an Iraqi-Iraqi war

"The lessons of Bosnia indicate that communities that have lived in relative harmony can embrace sectarian divisions overnight," warns a report by London's Royal Institute of International Affairs.

One result, it says, could be Iraq's fragmentation into a Kurdish north, Sunni centre and Shiite south. Moreover, a classified report by the US National Intelligence Council predicted President Bush this summer with several bleak scenarios, one of them envisioning civil war before the end of 2005. — AP

nior Kurdish politician and member of the former Iraqi Governing Council. "But if the ongoing violence is not contained, it will turn into an Iraqi-Iraqi war."

Many Iraqis put their faith in age-old ties among Shi'ites, Sunnis and Kurds to keep the peace — an understandable yearning, perhaps, since most Iraqis don't want to imagine things getting any worse.

But these ties, which are in large part confined to the cities, are fraying as security becomes more precarious and violence spreads across Iraq.

BAGHDAD, Sept. 22. — Sunni and Shiite clerics gunned down. Christian churches bombed. Hundreds of police killed, and Iraqi soldiers abducted and threatened with death.

Is Iraq heading to civil war? No way, say Prime Minister Mr Ayad Allawi and many of his countrymen, who blame the bloodshed on foreign Islamic extremists.

However, as the death toll rises, thoughtful Iraqis are beginning to fear the unthinkable. "We are not yet in a civil war," said Mahmoud Othman, a se-



In the midst of escalating violence, this boy can only wait for customers at a street stall in Baghdad. — AFP

Militants kill second American hostage

'Two women' for two men'

Baghdad, Sept. 21 (Reuters): Militants killed a second American captive in Iraq after a 24-hour deadline passed today, a website statement and Arab television said.

There was no immediate word of the fate of a Briton also being held by the Tawhid and Jihad group which yesterday said it had beheaded the first of three contractors seized last week.

The group, led by al Qaida ally Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, said yesterday in video footage of American Eugene Armstrong's killing that it would behead the other two within a day unless women inmates were freed from Abu Ghraib and Umm Qasr jails.

Al Jazeera television said a statement announcing the killing of fellow American Jack Hensley, 48, was on the Internet. On one Islamist site, a contributor who has in the past posted messages in the name of the group said he was dead.

"The sons of our nation have slit the throat of the second American hostage after the deadline passed and we will provide you with pictures soon," said the contributor, who goes by the pseudonym

Abu Maysarah al-Iraqi.

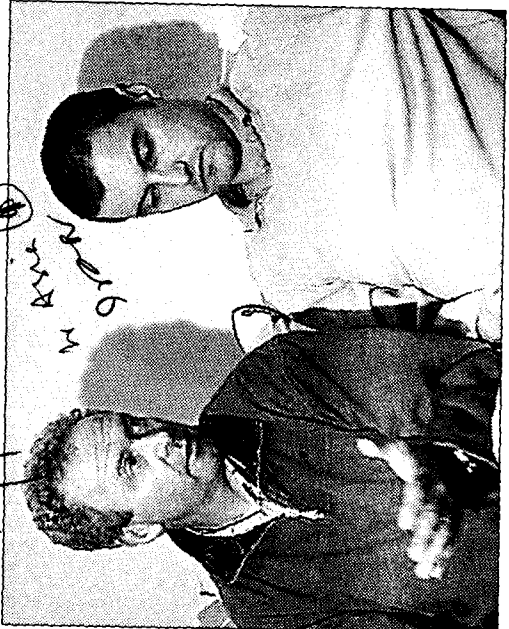
The US state department could not confirm the killing. President George W. Bush has said Washington will not negotiate, and at the UN today he vowed not to retreat against an insurgency he said was likely to bring increased violence in coming months.

The US military says there are no women in either of the named prisons, and only two women in US detention in Iraq. The high-profile two, nicknamed "Mrs Anthrax" and "Dr Germ", are accused of working on Saddam Hussein's weapons programmes and are held at a secret high-security camp.

The militants' first video footage released yesterday showed Armstrong, 52, sitting blindfolded on the floor in an orange jumpsuit, black-clad and hooded gunmen standing behind him.

One militant read a statement and attacked the hostage's neck with a knife. Further close-ups showed the head being sawn off. CIA said it believed Zarqawi — Washington's number one enemy in Iraq — was the man delivering the statement.

Armstrong, Hensley and



A TV picture shows Philip (left) and Craig Bigley, the brother and son of Kenneth Bigley, during an appeal to save the British hostage's life and (right) American hostage Jack Hensley (Reuters)

Bigley were seized by gunmen from the house they shared in Baghdad on Thursday.

In a speech with election-year overtones before sceptical world leaders at the UN annual general assembly, Bush made no apologies about going to war against Iraq in 2003 without UN Security Council backing.

"The work ahead is demanding. But these difficul-



London, Sept. 21 (Reuters): The family of a British hostage threatened with execution in Iraq begged Prime Minister Tony Blair today to save his life.

Kenneth Bigley, 62, is being held hostage with American Jack Hensley by the Tawhid and Jihad group headed by al Qaida ally Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. Another American seized with them last Thursday, Eugene Armstrong, was beheaded in a gruesome murder shown on an Internet video overnight.

Bigley's son Craig made a direct appeal to Blair, piling pressure on a Prime Minister who has already seen his popularity ratings plunge because of role in the Iraq war. "I ask Tony Blair personally to consider the amount of bloodshed already suffered," Craig said on BBC television. "Only you can save him now... Please meet the demands and release my father — two women for two men."

The US is holding two women scientists, suspected of working on ex-president Saddam Hussein's banned weapons programmes, in a special prison for high-profile detainees. In the video of Armstrong's murder, the hostage-takers said they had killed him because US authorities had failed to free women prisoners in Iraqi jails. They gave another 24 hours for Washington to do so, or the other two hostages would be killed. A spokesman for Blair's Downing Street office said he had nothing further to say for now. Blair has said little on the capture of Bigley and the Americans, a stance which contrasts with appeals by President Jacques Chirac for the release of two French journalists held hostage and with George W. Bush, who he would not bow to kidnappers' demands.

air strikes on the rebel-held city of Falluja, west of Baghdad, targeting suspected hideouts used by his followers.

Jordanian-born Zarqawi's group has claimed responsibility for most of the bloodiest suicide attacks since Saddam's overthrow, and beheaded US telecoms engineer Nicholas Berg in May and South Korean driver Kim Sun-il in June.

ties will not shake our conviction that the future of Afghanistan and Iraq is a future of liberty. The proper response to difficulty is not to retreat — it is to prevail," he added, to no more than polite applause. Bush faces re-election in November.

The US has offered \$25 million for information leading to Zarqawi's death or capture, and has launched a series of

Iran defies UN, starts uranium tests

*W. Aziz
19/9/01*

Vienna, Sept. 21 (Reuters): Iran defied the UN today by announcing it would go on converting a large amount of raw uranium to prepare it for enrichment, a process that can be used to develop atomic bombs.

The announcement was likely to provoke an angry reaction from Washington and increase suspicion in Israel, which plans to buy 500 "bunker buster" bombs from the US that could take out Iran's underground atomic facilities.

Gholamreza Aghazadeh, the head of Iran's Atomic Energy Organisation, told reporters Iran had begun converting 37 tonnes of raw "yellowcake" uranium to process it for use in nuclear centrifuges — the machines that enrich uranium.

The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the UN's nuclear watchdog, unanimously adopted a resolution on Saturday calling on Iran to suspend all activities related to uranium enrichment. The US, Russia and the EU reinforced the message yesterday by urging Tehran to comply.

"Some of the amount of the 37 tonnes has been used. The tests have been successful

but these tests have to be continued using the rest of the material," said Aghazadeh, one of Iran's vice-presidents, who is attending a general conference of the Vienna-based IAEA.

One nuclear expert has said that once converted from yellowcake into uranium hexafluoride, the feed material for enrichment centrifuges, Iran would eventually be able to enrich enough uranium for up to five nuclear weapons.

Iranian President Mohammad Khatami said Iran was determined to press ahead with its atomic programme even if it brought an end to UN checks of the Islamic Republic's nuclear sites.

"We are determined to obtain peaceful atomic technology even if it causes the stop of international supervision," Khatami said. "We have never wanted nuclear weapons. We want peaceful technology."

Iran had told the IAEA this summer that it intended to run what it described as tests of its uranium conversion facility. However, today's announcement came after the IAEA board of governors passed the resolution on Saturday calling on Iran to halt all activities linked to uranium enrichment.

*Gr 3
2/9*

Iran had promised France, Britain and Germany last October would freeze all activities related to uranium enrichment in exchange for improved economic ties. But Tehran angered the EU's "big three" by announcing earlier this year that the production of feed material for centrifuges would not be included in the freeze.

Bloodbath in Iraq

The stigma of incompetence

Fewer than 200 body-bags were consumed, when from the deck of an aircraft carrier with a banner declaring "mission accomplished", George W Bush raised the victory toast. The US death toll has now crossed the four-figure mark and keeps rising, without a flicker of hope that Iraq will soon be rid of violence. Colin Powell mentions the possibility of the country breaking up, and the talk of elections missing the January deadline, add up to an admission of American policy being seriously unstuck — if indeed there was a post-Saddam policy at all. That the coming elections in Australia and the USA, possibly the UK in next year too, will be greatly influenced by Iraq, is something that Bush, Blair and camp-follower Howard never imagined when they launched their aggressive war. Defeat for any member of the trio would not be an international catastrophe, but the blood that keeps flowing down the Tigris and Euphrates is a universal disgrace.

The 1000-plus figure for American deaths is, at least, accurate. Nobody has cared, or dared, to maintain a tally of the Iraqi deaths since March 2003. But even the guesses — a minimum of 10,000 — ought to generate passions deeper than shock and awe. The fact that such a massive loss of life counts for so little among the bosses in Washington, finds reflection in the manner in which the US forces are conducting operations in Iraq. The Rumsfeld Doctrine makes a mockery of the much-vaunted "soldiers' honour." The Powell Doctrine (use of overwhelming force) is also disquietingly expressive: air-strikes on houses in which suspected terrorists are hiding, helicopter gun-ships to break up crowds, and machine-gun-bristling Hercules transports flying over sacred shrines also at Najaf. Is flattening built-up areas a valid tactic for counter-insurgency? America's military leadership does have a lot to answer for, the tragedy is that nobody calls it to account. A number of terms are now being used to describe the American misadventure in Iraq. One that has no relevance is "Bush's Vietnam" — simply because George W had sat that one out.

Iran rejects UN call for N-freeze

PARISA HAFEZI

TEHRAN, SEPTEMBER 19

IRAN today rejected a UN resolution calling on it to freeze uranium enrichment activities.

It also threatened to stop snap checks of its atomic facilities if its case were sent to the Security Council. Iran's chief nuclear negotiator Hassan Rohani said if the Security Council imposed sanctions, Iran might follow North Korea and pull out of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty altogether.

Washington says Iran plans to use enriched uranium to make nuclear weapons, while Iran claims its nuclear programme is dedicated solely to electricity generation.

The IAEA unanimously adopted a resolution yesterday calling on Iran to suspend all uranium enrichment-related activities. "Iran will not accept any obligation regarding the

suspension of uranium enrichment," Chief nuclear negotiator Hassan Rohani said on Sunday. "No international body can force Iran to do so."

His words were echoed by the Iranian Parliament, which has urged the government to ignore the resolution. "This is a war, we may win or lose," said Rohani, Secretary-General of Iran's Supreme National Security Council.

Although the IAEA board termed the suspension a "necessary" confidence-building measure, it observed that any suspensions would be "voluntary decisions" for Iran and not obligations. "Iran has never accepted suspension through a resolution, but through political talks," Rohani said. "If they want to send Iran to the Security Council, it is not wise, and we will stop implementing the Additional Protocol," he added.

—Reuters

Iraq had no WMD: report

By Julian Borger

WASHINGTON, SEPT. 19. The comprehensive 15-month search for weapons of mass destruction in Iraq has concluded that the only chemical or biological agents that Saddam Hussein's regime was working on before last year's invasion were small quantities of poisons, most likely for use in assassinations.

A draft of the Iraq Survey Group's final report circulating in Washington found no sign of the alleged illegal stockpiles that the U.S. and Britain presented as the justification for going to

war, nor did it find any evidence of efforts to reconstitute Iraq's nuclear weapons programme.

It also appears to play down an interim report which suggested there was evidence that Iraq was developing "test amounts" of ricin for use in weapons. Instead, the ISG report says in its conclusion that there was evidence to suggest the Iraqi regime planned to restart its illegal weapons programmes if U.N. sanctions were lifted. Charles Duelfer, the head of the ISG, has said he intends to deliver his final report by the end of the month. It is likely to

become a heated issue in the election campaign.

The U.S. President, George W. Bush, now admits that stockpiles have not been found in Iraq but claimed as recently as Thursday that "Saddam Hussein had the capability of making weapons, and he could have passed that capability on to the enemy". The draft Duelfer report, according to the *New York Times*, finds no evidence of a capability, but only of an intention to rebuild that capability once the U.N. embargo had been removed. — ©Guardian Newspapers Limited 2004

THE HINDU

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Iran terms IAEA move illegal

TEHERAN, SEPT. 19. Iran today said demands from the U.N. atomic watchdog that it freeze all uranium enrichment work that can be used for nuclear weapons were 'illegal,' but left open the possibility it was ready for negotiations.

The remarks from Hasan Rowhani, Iran's top nuclear negotiator, included defiance and boasting that Iran had advanced its nuclear know-how despite international attempts to rein it in, but stopped short of outright rejection of the U.N. International Atomic Energy Agency's demands. Such ambiguity has led the U.S. and other officials to accuse Iran of hiding

its nuclear intentions and trying to stonewall the international community. Iran says its nuclear programme is only for energy.

Mr. Rowhani spoke a day after the IAEA governing board issued its demands and said it would judge Teheran's compliance in two months.

"We are committed to the suspension of actual enrichment but we have no decision to expand the suspension," he said. "This demand is illegal and does not put any obligation on Iran. The IAEA board of governors has no right to make such a suspension obligatory for any country." — AP

THE HINDU

19 SEP 2004

Iraqis want foreign troops out

By Jonathan Steele

KOFI ANNAN'S declaration that the attack on Iraq by the United States and Britain was illegal will renew the pressure on Tony Blair over the war. The British Prime Minister's claim that he went to war partly to defend the United Nations' authority in the face of Saddam Hussein's non-compliance with Security Council resolutions now lies in tatters — along with his other justifications. When the U.N. Secretary-General himself says that it was Washington and London that were not complying with international law, George W. Bush and Mr. Blair should now clearly acknowledge they did wrong.

But it was not just the launch of the war that was illegal. Illegality continues today. Take the U.S. helicopter attack on a crowd in Haifa Street, Baghdad, last Sunday, which killed 13 persons and injured dozens. It was almost certainly a war crime. The pilots' unarmed victims came in to the street after insurgents had destroyed an American Bradley fighting vehicle, a cross between a tank and an armoured personnel carrier. The soldiers inside it were quickly rescued by comrades and withdrew. By the time the jubilant crowd gathered to gawp at the Bradley's smouldering remains, military activity had ceased.

Why then did the pilots shoot? The official version is that ground fire was being aimed at them. Even if true, questions remain. Why did the helicopters not fly off to safety? Fire

need not be answered, if there is a more sensible way of avoiding being hit, especially when the ground troops the helicopters were supposedly protecting had already left the scene. Secondly, did the pilots properly assess the risk to civilians from a disproportionate response? From the casualties caused, the evidence strongly suggests they did not.

The assumption has to be that the pilots' motive was revenge. If so, the incident would not be unique. In

Iraq have led to court proceedings. The bigger issue of crimes against civilians perpetrated in the air above Iraqi cities and from tanks and other vehicles is still taboo.

Armies which resort to revenge are usually the ones that are losing. Within the Sunni region, Ramadi, Falluja and Samarra have become no-go areas. The same is true of the Shia holy cities of Kerbala and Najaf. It is not that U.S. forces are impotent. With their overwhelming firepower

oured by that. Others claim to see a risk of violent clashes between Sunnis and Shias and even civil war. These forecasts are probably too pessimistic, but in the short term the greater danger is that the U.S. will use the pretext of protecting the elections to try to "recapture" cities it has lost. This would be disastrous.

The U.N. election plan treats Iraq as a single constituency and makes it unnecessary for candidates or parties to campaign everywhere. Even if there were no violence, Shia parties — such as Da'wa, Sciri, and Moqtada al-Sadr's people (if they decide to run) — would not campaign in Sunni cities. In reverse, the same goes for the largely Sunni Iraqi Islamic party.

So the fact that Falluja, Ramadi and other Sunni towns are virtually out of bounds to outsiders is not an argument for cancelling the elections there. Cancellation would send a terrible signal, implying that Mr. Allawi and his U.S. backers were trying to disenfranchise the Sunni and favour Shias. This would be more likely to provoke sectarian conflict than any other measure.

Iraqis of almost all persuasions want elections, and the claim that the resistance is trying to block them has no evidence to back it. Most Iraqis, including the militias, see the elections as the best key to ending the occupation and getting the U.S. to leave. Their views should be respected. — ©Guardian Newspapers Limited 2004

Yes, the invasion was illegal. But war crimes are still being committed.

they are unbeatable. What is changing is the growth of resistance, both military and political, and the ebbing-away of U.S. legitimacy. Increasing numbers of influential Iraqis tell U.S. commanders to keep out of populated areas and withdraw to barracks, as Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani did most notably in Najaf.

Those in the U.S. who see Iraq as a strategic asset and cover long-term bases will probably try to postpone the January elections. Noises are already being made that insecurity will prevent them being free.

Some analysts are making gloomy predictions that Iraq will split apart if U.S. troops pull out. Supporters of the fragmentation scenario include long-time backers of Kurdish independence, and their views are col-

Allies, UN differ on 'illegal' Iraq war

UNHQ, Sept. 17. — As the USA and its allies defended the legality of war against Iraq, the UN stood firm on the position taken by Secretary-General Mr Kofi Annan that it was "illegal" and violated the charter of the world body since it was conducted without Security Council authorisation.

Replying to questions, chief UN spokesman Mr Fred Eckhard said Mr Annan had only reiterated his well known position during an interview with BBC on Wednesday that the military action was "not in conformity with the UN Charter". "We see nothing new in it... he feels it's no different what he's been saying for more than a year, and that position is well known to member governments," Mr Eck-

52 killed

BAGHDAD, Sept. 17. — A suicide car bomber slammed into a line of police cars sealing off a Baghdad neighbourhood a American troops rounded up dozens of suspected militants, including many foreign fighters, capping a day of violence across Iraq that left at least 52 dead, officials said. — AP

hard told reporters.

The USA, Britain and Australian government: who are facing election: asserted the war had th legal basis but Mr Annan' statement, coming 51 day before the US presidential polls, gave handle to critics to attack the government especially at a time when war is not going well and security situation is deteriorating by the day. — PTI

US pounds Fallujah, 44 dead

Associated Press
Baghdad, September 17

A SUICIDE attacker detonated a car packed with explosives in front of a row of parked police cars in central Baghdad on Friday, killing at least five people and wounding 20, officials said.

A half dozen police cars were blocking a bridge leading to the central Haifa Street, where Iraqi and American forces were conducting raids, when a blue Chevrolet drove up to them, policeman Ammar Ali said. Police told the driver to stop, but he continued to advance and exploded his vehicle in the middle of the parked cars, he said.

The bombing came after the US launched new airstrikes on the Sunni insurgent stronghold of Fallujah and nearby villages on Friday. The US put the death toll at 60 insurgents; Iraqi officials said 44 people were dead, including women and children. The Iraqi Health Ministry said five people were killed and 20 wounded in the car bombing. Thousands of shoppers streamed from the area after police fired shots to disperse the crowd.

"I saw human flesh and blood in the street, then I fled," said Mouayad Shehab as he escaped the scene.

The police vehicles had been helping to seal of the area around Haifa Street, where American and Iraqi forces had raided suspected insurgent hideouts in the morning, sparking a gunbattle. More than 50 suspects were detained during the sweeps on Haifa street, a virtual "no-go" area for US forces, said ministry spokesman Sabah Kadhim.

The clashes came a day after a team of kidnapers grabbed two Americans and a Briton in a dawn raid on their home on a leafy Baghdad neighbourhood — a bold abduction that underlines



Policemen gather around smouldering police cars after a suicide-bomber detonated an explosive-filled car targeting an Iraqi police convoy in Baghdad on Friday.

AP

Iraq had no WMDs: American weapons inspector

FALLEN IRAQI President Saddam Hussein did not have stockpiles of weapons of mass destruction, but left signs that he had idle programs he someday hoped to revive, the top US weapons inspector in Iraq concludes in a draft report due out soon.

According to people familiar with the 1,500-page report, the head of the Iraq Survey Group, Charles Duelfer, will find that Saddam was importing banned materials, working on unmanned aerial vehicles in violation of UN agreements and maintaining a dual-use industrial sector that could pro-

duce weapons. Duelfer also says Iraq only had small research and development programmes for chemical and biological weapons. As Duelfer puts the finishing touches on his report, he concludes Saddam had intentions of restarting weapons programs at some point, after suspicion and inspections from the international community waned. After a year and a half in Iraq, however, the US has found no weapons of mass destruction — its chief argument for going to war.

AP, Washington

the increasing danger for foreigners in the embattled capital as violence soars ahead of national elections planned for early next year.

The Fallujah attacks began late on Thursday, targeting a compound about 12

miles south of Fallujah where militants loyal to Jordanian-born terror mastermind Abu Musab al-Zarqawi militants gathered to plot attacks on coalition forces, the military said in a statement.

On Friday, warplanes

bombed a cluster of houses in Fallujah believed to be used by Zarqawi's Tawhid and Jihad group.

The American military claimed that up to 60 suspected insurgents may have been killed.

Iraq invasion illegal: Annan

Press Trust of India

UNHQ, Sept. 16. — UN Secretary-General Mr Kofi Annan has termed the US-led invasion of Iraq as "illegal" and said the war contravened the world body's charter.

With a spurt in violence against US-led forces and civilians supporting the interim administration, Mr Annan also feared that "credible" elections in Iraq, scheduled for January, were unlikely to take place given the present security scenario.

In an interview to BBC World Service broadcast yesterday, he said the decision to take action in Iraq should have been made by the UN Security Council, not unilaterally. "I am one of those who believe that there should have been a second resolution." Asked if he viewed the invasion as illegal, he said: "Yes, if you wish... I have indicated that it was not in conformity with the UN Charter from our point of view, and from the Charter point of view it was illegal."

Observing that "painful lessons" had been learnt



I hope we don't see another Iraq-type operation for a long time — without UN approval and broader support from the international community

since the war, Mr Annan said: "I hope we do not see another Iraq-type operation for a long time — without UN approval and much broader support from the international community." On the "lessons learnt" from the war, he said: "Everybody has concluded that it's best to work together with our allies and through the UN."

With less than four

months left for the Iraq elections, the Secretary-General warned that there could not be "credible elections if the security conditions remain as they are now". The UN will give advice and assistance to the Iraqi interim government in the run-up to the polls, he said. But it was up to the administration to decide whether elections should take place in such an atmosphere.

Mr Annan's statements came ahead of the General Assembly's annual session next week, where heads of all the member countries are likely to converge.

Meanwhile, a British foreign office spokesperson told the BBC that the attorney-general had made the government's position clear about the legality of the military action in Iraq at the time of the war.

She said there was a full commitment to holding polls in January, with election and political party laws already passed and an independent electoral commission established.

Another report on page 3

17 SEP 2004

Two Americans, Briton kidnapped in Iraq

Associated Press

BAGHDAD, Sept. 16. — Gunmen kidnapped two Americans and a Briton from a house in the heart of the Iraqi capital today, the interior ministry and witnesses said.

The three were seized from a two-story house surrounded by a wall in Al-Mansour neighborhood at dawn, said Mr Adnan Abdel-Rahman, an interior ministry official. Mr Rahman initially said the three were all British nationals. He said they were employed by Gulf Services Company, a West Asia-based construction firm.

A US Embassy spokesman, speaking on condition of anonymity, could not immediately confirm the report but said officials were investigating. British diplomats in Baghdad were also unable to confirm details.

A police officer, who asked not to be named, said a car was missing from the house were the hostages were believed to have been kidnapped. He said the three were apparently in the garden when the attack took place and that there was no sign of any fighting. Neighbours said they heard two vehicles drive up to the house around dawn. Today's kidnapping came a day after vil-

lagers found three decapitated bodies in Dijel, north of Baghdad. The bodies were found in nylon bags, the heads in bags alongside them.

Also today, a US Humvee hit a roadside bomb south of Fallujah. Witnesses said the vehicle was ablaze on a main road near the city.

Overhaul of US Intelligence

The US Senate has taken a major step towards reorganising the US Intelligence network, unveiling groundbreaking legislation to strengthen the country's defences against terrorism, adds AFP from New York.

US suspects Iran has N-testing site

17/19
Associated Press
Vienna, September 16

A US official expressed alarm on Thursday about a possible nuclear-weapons-related test site in Iran and accused the UN nuclear watchdog agency of keeping silent on its own concerns about the issue.

The official — a senior member of the US delegation at the International Atomic Energy Agency's board

N Korea not to join nuke talks

NORTH KOREA said on Thursday it will not join the six-nation talks aimed at ending N-weapons programme until rival South Korea fully discloses the details of its secret atomic experiments. The comments clouded US-led international efforts to hold a talks on the North's nuclear programme.

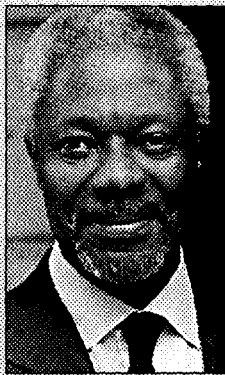
AP, Seoul

of governors — spoke as US and European negotiators moved closer to agreement to censure Iran for reneging on a freeze on uranium enrichment and setting a deadline for Tehran to dispel suspicions it is trying to make nuclear arms.

The official said the US was suspicious that Iran's Parchin complex, southeast of the capital, Tehran, is being used by the Islamic Republic to test high explosives, possibly with applications to nuclear weapons.

"This is a serious omission," on the part of IAEA director general Mohamed ElBaradei, said the official, alluding to the lack of specific mention on Parchin in a report written for the board by ElBaradei on the status of a probe into Iran's nuclear activities. The official said the US would "go to the other board members" and make sure the suspicious site is considered in any Iran resolution submitted to the board meeting.

An Iran delegation member dismissed as "a lie" reports that the agency had asked to visit the site.



Iraq war illegal

THE UNITED Nations Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, declared explicitly for the first time on Wednesday that the US-led war on Iraq was illegal. Annan said that the invasion was not sanctioned by the UN security council or in accordance with the UN's founding charter. In an interview with the BBC World Service, he was asked outright if the war was illegal. He replied: "Yes, if you wish." "I've indicated that it was not in conformity with the UN Charter from our point of view, and from the Charter point of view it was illegal."

PTI, United Nations

16 SEP 2004

Israel backs out from US roadmap to peace

Associated Press

JERUSALEM, Sept. 15. — Israel will not follow the US-backed roadmap peace plan and could remain in much of the West Bank for an extended period after it withdraws from the Gaza Strip, Prime Minister Mr Ariel Sharon said in a newspaper interview published today.

Palestinian officials said the remarks confirmed their fears that Israel plans to draw its own borders and keep a large chunk of the West Bank, rather than negotiate a peace deal with the Palestinians, as envisioned by the roadmap.

Mr Sharon's plan of "unilateral disengagement" from the Palestinians, a withdrawal from Gaza and

four West Bank settlements in 2005, has created deep divisions in Israel, with opponents resorting to increasingly harsh rhetoric against him.

Police said they are investigating death threats against the Prime Minister.

Yesterday, senior Cabinet ministers approved payment of cash advances to settlers who leave their homes ahead of a September 2005 deadline, the first practical step toward the Gaza pullout.

Settler families could get more than \$100,000 each as down payment. Mr Yonathan Bassi, the head of the government agency making the compensation payments, told the daily *Haaretz* that about 100 families have already applied.

The government hopes the money

In an interview with the *Yediot Ahronot* newspaper published today, Mr Sharon said that once Israel withdraws from Gaza and the four West Bank settlements, "it is very possible ... there will be a long period when nothing else happens".

He said that as long as there is no significant shift in the Palestinian leadership and policy, "Israel will continue its war on terrorism, and will stay in the territories (of the West Bank) that will remain after the implementation of disengagement."

The roadmap was adopted by Israel and the Palestinians last year, but never got off the ground. The plan envisioned a Palestinian state by 2005, but did not spell out its borders.

US officials have said, however, that Israel's occupation of the West Bank and Gaza must end. US President George W Bush has since said that it would be "unrealistic" to expect Israel to remove large Israeli population centres in the West Bank, a statement seen by Mr Sharon as backing for his plan to keep large West Bank settlement blocs in any future deal with the Palestinians.

Palestinian Cabinet minister Mr Saeb Erekat said Mr Sharon confirmed Palestinian fears that the disengagement plan is a ploy to cement Israel's control over large areas of the West Bank.

US and EU officials have assured the Palestinians that they would only back disengagement as part of the road map.



Mr Ariel Sharon

will entice large numbers of settlers to leave voluntarily, and make it easier for troops to evacuate those remaining.

Eleven killed in West Bank

In the West Bank city of Nablus, troops surrounded a building where fugitives were holed up, and a gun-battle erupted, Palestinian witnesses said. Palestinian security officials said six armed men from the Al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades, a violent group with ties to Mr Yasser Arafat's Fatah movement, were killed in the fighting. Among those killed was Nader Aswad, a local leader who was on Israel's most-wanted. An 11-year-old girl living nearby was also shot dead in the clash, her family said.

In Jenin, Israeli undercover troops killed four Palestinians in a raid of a car repair shop, witnesses said. The four men too were all members of the Al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades.

W. A. ...
HD-13

Iraq's spiral of violence

By Rory McCarthy

BAGHDAD, SEPT. 15. Within hours of the latest suicide bombing in Baghdad yesterday, Faleh Naqib, the Iraqi Interior Minister, had arrived at the scene dressed in a suit and sunglasses to signal his Government's determination to tackle the terrible spiral of violence.

At least he was brave enough to venture to the blast site. When the U.S. occupation authorities were running the country before July, none of their officials dared visit the scenes of the countless explosions that have claimed so many innocent lives.

Yet yesterday morning, as most Iraqis do most days, the crowd mocked and taunted the Minister and his Government, incensed at the lawlessness of the new Iraq.

It is almost exactly 18 months since America and Britain embarked on the invasion and re-shaping of Iraq. By now they had expected marked signs of reconstruction and development and the foundation of a democratic process that would

ship and hold up a model for the Arab world. And yet the project looks bleaker than ever before.

Loses control

For the second time this year, the U.S. military has lost control of several pockets of insurgency across Iraq, including such towns as Falluja and Ramadi, in the Sunni heartland west of Baghdad, and even districts of the capital itself, such as the eastern Shia slums of Sadr City.

The kidnapping industry is burgeoning. Since the war hundreds of Iraqis have been taken captive for extortionate ransoms. After separate Sunni and Shia uprisings in April, the kidnappers have set their sights on foreigners: so far at least 26 foreign truck drivers, contractors and journalists have been executed and around another 20 are still being held. Dozens more have eventually been released alive.

Attacks on the U.S.-led military coalition have reached a new peak. In April, then the worst month of violence since the war and a time when the

some of its most important supply routes, there were an average of 60 attacks a day against the troops. Last month there were 87.

Earlier this year, U.S. commanders insisted there were at most only 5,000 insurgents in Iraq. Now they publicly admit there may be 12,000. In private they say up to 20,000.

The most militant of the groups that make up the 'muqawama,' or resistance, is al-Tawhid al-Jihad, apparently led by the Jordanian Islamic militant Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. His group has been blamed for dozens of car bombings and assassinations and has claimed responsibility for kidnappings and executions.

Yesterday the group took responsibility for the car bomb that killed 47 persons and injured more than 100 others at the police recruiting station in Baghdad.

"With the grace of God, a lion from our martyrdom brigades was successful in striking a centre for apostate police volun-

teers," it said on a militant website.

Key to tackling violence

The first elections since the war are due in January and only they, surely, hold the key to tackling the violence. "We want to rule our country. That is not too much to ask," said Wamid Nadmi, a political scientist at Baghdad University and outspoken critic of the occupation.

Iyad Allawi, Prime Minister for less than three months, is desperate to hold the political process on track. His words are laden with confidence and the promise of the tough rule of law.

"What we are after really is implementing the political process, to move towards the elections," he said at the weekend. "We are confident that we will be able to have the elections conducted in January." He said he could not see bastions of insurgency such as Falluja still being a problem by then. "I cannot see this happening," he said. — ©Guardian Newspapers Limited 2004

47 killed in Baghdad car bomb blast

49-7
139
w/ photo
gdn

Agence France Presse

BAGHDAD, Sept. 14. — At least 47 people were killed in a massive car bomb blast outside the main police headquarters in Baghdad today, leaving a trail of carnage and chaos in a bustling area of the Iraqi capital.

Witnesses said dozens of people were queuing outside the station, which doubles as a police recruitment centre, when the explosives-rigged vehicle blew up, sending shards of shrapnel flying and clouds of smoke into the air.

A health ministry spokesman said 47 people were killed and 114 wounded in the blast which occurred in the Haifa street area, a troubled district of Baghdad considered a bastion of Saddam Hussein loyalists.

The attack came just two days after fierce clashes between US forces and insurgents in the same area left at least 13 people dead and 55 wounded.

Two other Iraqis were seriously wounded when another bomb exploded near the planning ministry nearly simultaneously, the health ministry said.

Police sergeant Haider Hamid said the first bomb struck outside the main entrance of the al-Karkh police centre, near a football pitch and school, but that the building



Iraqi policemen secure the al-Khalani square in central Baghdad as a vehicle burns after a roadside bomb exploded on Tuesday. — AFP

11 cops shot in Baquba

BAQUBA, Sept. 14. — Gunmen in two cars opened fire today on a van carrying policemen home from work, killing 11 officers and a civilian, police and hospital officials said.

The incident occurred when the policemen were returning to their station after they were told that a trip to a training camp has been postponed, said a police officer on condition of anonymity.

Police commander in the area, Major General Walid Khaled confirmed 11 of his men were killed saying they all came from the town of Khanaqin near the border with Iran.

"We are investigating the case and we have some leads to the crime," he said. Eleven policemen were killed as well as the civilian driver, said Mr Qaisar Hamid of Baquba General Hospital. Two others were wounded he said. — AP

Jordanian militant group claims responsibility

CAIRO, Sept. 14. — Statements posted on an Islamic website claim the group headed by Jordanian militant Abu Musab al-Zarqawi was responsible for two major attacks in Iraq today that killed a total of more than 50 people. One statement, signed "Jawhid and Jihad group," said: "Thanks to God alone, a lion from the Brigades of Those Seeking Martyrdom succeeded in attacking the centre of volunteers for the renegade police apparatus." It proved no details on the attack, but appeared to refer to a car bomb blast near a Baghdad police headquarters, killing 47. Another statement on the same site claimed responsibility for "striking at a car that had more than 10 elements from the police, leading to their deaths."

Al-Jazeera broadcast footage today of a Jordanian truck driver taken hostage in Iraq. The footage showed three masked men standing behind the kneeling hostage, who held his passport in front of him. The group, "Brigades of Al-Jawhid Lions," gave the man's employer 48 hours to suspend its activities in Iraq. Two Irish truck drivers were also abducted on their way to Kirkuk today, an Iraqi police officer said in Tikrit. — Agencies

itself escaped with only minor damage.

Shrapnel devastated a row of simple shops, including a cafe, just after 10:00 a.m. (11.30 a.m. IST), sending smashed glass and twisted debris everywhere.

Outside one smashed shop was a pool table where children, still on summer holiday in Baghdad, often played billiards.

Body parts were littered everywhere and pools of congealed blood were smeared across the pavement.

W. A. ...
H. A. ...
IRAQI RESISTANCE / U.S. TARGETS FALLUJAH HD-13
100 killed in clashes 14/9

By Atul Aneja

MANAMA, SEPT. 13. In less than 24 hours after Sunday's attacks which killed more than 100 Iraqis, American warplanes have raided the Sunni stronghold of nearby Fallujah, killing at least 18 persons and injuring 29.

In the pre-dawn raid, the U.S. planes bombed different locations in the city, while ground troops positioned at the outskirts fired artillery shells. The *Al-Jazeera* television reported that seven persons including the driver of an ambulance, which was ferrying casualties, were killed in one of these attacks. In another neighbourhood, three homes were destroyed in the strike, resulting in an unspecified number of killings.

'Liberated zone'

Yet another explosion went off in a market place as the first stall owners had just begun to set up their stalls for the day, wounding several people and shattering windows, eyewitnesses said.

Fallujah has been subjected

to repeated air raids in recent months and the latest attack has resulted in an exodus of hundreds of families from the strife-torn city. The city had virtually become a "liberated zone" after the U.S. troops withdrew in April and handed over security to a local force. Faced with the stiff Iraqi resistance, the U.S. has also lost its grip over the neighbouring towns of Ramadi, Samaara and Baquba.

But with elections for an Iraqi constituent assembly slated for January 2005, U.S. forces are making a fresh bid to regain as much control as possible over guerilla strongholds so that polls can take place.

Despite the intent, there is a realisation in occupied Iraq that re-establishing hold over Fallujah in the coming months may not be possible.

In an interview published in several newspapers today, the U.S.-appointed interim Prime Minister, Iyad Allawi, has said that elections would still be held, even if the people of Fallujah are unable to participate in them.

"If for any reason 300,000

people cannot have an election, cannot vote (that)... is not going to alter 25 million people voting." If the elections were prevented in Fallujah, its inhabitants could vote later, he said.

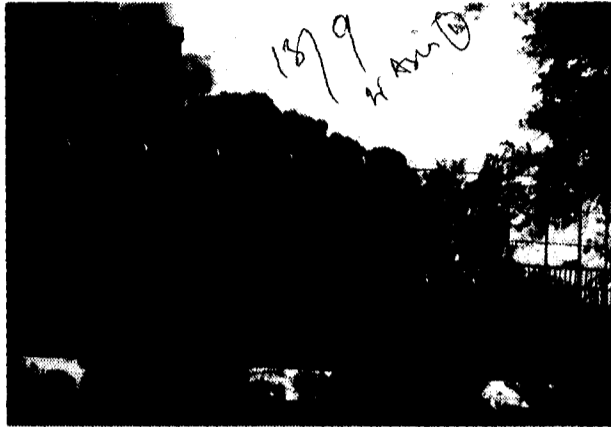
Efforts to free hostages

Efforts to seek the release of the two kidnapped Italian women gathered momentum, with the Italian Foreign Minister, Franco Frattini, visiting Kuwait today.

The kidnappers have threatened to kill the two women, Simona Pari and Simona Torretta, unless Italy immediately announces the withdrawal of its troops from Iraq. Mr. Frattini is scheduled to hold talks with Kuwait's leaders, besides visiting the Grand Mosque where he is expected to appeal for the hostages' release.

ZARQAWI LOYALISTS CLAIM HAND

44 dead in fresh violence



A car burns on a bridge near the road leading to Baghdad International Airport on Sunday. — AFP

Agence France Presse

BAGHDAD, Sept. 12. — At least 44 people died in a wave of bombings and battles between US troops and insurgents today, as Iraq's Prime Minister said more than 3,000 had perished in the "terrorism" washing over the country.

Amid the violence, a persistent hostage crisis ground on with militants, according to an Islamist website statement, threatening to kill two Italian women if Rome did not recall its troops from Iraq within 24 hours. "If we don't see the Italian troops withdraw from the land of Iraq, we will implement Allah's judgement on them, which will be slaughter," said the Islamic Jihad Organisation in Iraq.

Loyalists of alleged Al-Qaida chief in Iraq, Abu Mussab al-Zarqawi, claimed attacks on the heavily fortified central Baghdad compound housing the government and the US embassy and on the notorious Abu Gharib prison.

At least 13 people were killed, including two children, and 55 wounded during intense fighting around central Baghdad's Halfa Street, considered a bastion of Saddam loyalists, said the health ministry.

The US military said six soldiers were also wounded.

Mazen al-Tomasi, a Palestinian working for Saudi and Al-Arabiya television, died as he was reporting live from Baghdad during the clashes, a colleague said.

Heavy machine gun and assault rifle fire reverberated across Halfa Street for three hours and a tank was deployed to support US troops in an area that is perfect sniper territory with high-rise apartment blocks all around.

A car bomb exploded near the tank, setting it ablaze and witnesses said a mob pelted it with stones and danced around it. One man climbed on top, waving a black flag emblazoned with the name of Zarqawi's Tawhid wal Jihad group.

US helicopters then swooped down over the neighbourhood and fired missiles and heavy machine gun fire into the crowd, killing at least five.

THE NEW YORK TIMES

13 SEP 2004

স্বাইব-কাণ্ডে কারাদণ্ড, বরখাস্তও মার্কিন সেনা

বাগদাদ, ১১ সেপ্টেম্বর: আবু স্বাইব কারাগারে ইরাকি যুদ্ধবন্দিদের উপরে পাশবিক অত্যাচার চালানোর দায়ে আট মাস কারাদণ্ড, সেই সঙ্গে পদাবনতি ঘটিয়ে বরখাস্ত করা হল এক মার্কিন সেনা-গোয়েন্দাকে। আর্মিন ক্রুজ নামে ২৪ বছর বয়সী ওই সেনা অফিসারের বিরুদ্ধে যুদ্ধবন্দিদের সঙ্গে খারাপ ব্যবহার করা ও তাদের উপরে অত্যাচার চালানোর জন্য ষড়যন্ত্র করার অভিযোগ আনা হয়েছিল। সামরিক আদালতে তাঁর বিরুদ্ধে ওঠা অভিযোগ স্বীকার করে নেন ক্রুজ। তিনিই প্রথম মার্কিন সেনা-গোয়েন্দা, যিনি স্বাইব-কাণ্ডে শাস্তি পেলেন।

গত এপ্রিল মাসে আবু স্বাইবে মার্কিন সেনার নৃশংস অত্যাচারের ছবি প্রকাশিত হওয়ার পরে বিশ্বজোড়া সমালোচনার মুখে নিজেদের দায় এড়াতে উঠেপড়ে লেগেছিল আমেরিকা। অভিযোগ ওঠে, যুদ্ধবন্দিদের উপরে অত্যাচার চালানোর বিষয়টি বাগদাদের মার্কিন সেনা কর্তৃপক্ষ আগাগোড়াই জানতেন। এবং তাঁদের নির্দেশেই ইরাকিদের উপরে যৌনপীড়ন চালিয়েছিল অধস্তন মার্কিন সেনারা। এই অভিযোগের জবাবে বৃশ প্রশাসন বলেছিল, জনা কয়েক সেনা নিজেরাই এই কাণ্ড করেছে। জেরার আগে বন্দিদের 'নরম' করার জন্য গোয়েন্দারা তাদের উপরে অত্যাচার চালানোর নির্দেশ দেননি। ক্রুজ অত্যাচারের দায় স্বীকার করার পরে তাঁর শাস্তি ঘোষণা করলেও সরকারি নির্দেশে অত্যাচার চালানো হয়েছিল কি না, তা খতিয়ে দেখেনি সামরিক আদালত।

মার্কিন বিদেশসচিব ডোনাল্ড রামসফেল্ডও বিষয়টি লম্বু করে দেখিয়ে দাবি করেন, সন্ত্রাসবাদীরা যা করছে তার তুলনায় আবু স্বাইবের অত্যাচার কিছুই নয়। তাঁর প্রশ্ন, "টি ভি ক্যামেরার সামনে কারও মাথা কেটে নেওয়ার সঙ্গে এর তুলনা চলে কি?" বন্দিদের জেরার সময় আরও কড়া দাওয়াই প্রয়োগের অনুমতি তিনি দিয়েছিলেন, তা মানলেও রামসফেল্ড বলেন, এই ব্যবস্থা কিউবার গুয়ানতানামো বের জন্য। ইরাকের সঙ্গে তার কোনও সম্পর্ক নেই। স্বাইব-কাণ্ডে এ পর্যন্ত আট জন মার্কিন সেনার বিরুদ্ধে অভিযোগ দায়ের করা হয়েছে। তাঁদের মধ্যে ক্রুজই প্রথম শাস্তি পেলেন। — রয়টার্স

US soldier pleads guilty to abuse

Baghdad, Sept. 11 (Reuters): The first American military intelligence soldier to be court-martialled over the Abu Ghraib abuse scandal was sentenced today to eight months in jail, a reduction in rank and a bad-conduct discharge.

Specialist Armin Cruz, a military intelligence analyst, had pleaded guilty to maltreatment and conspiracy to maltreat detainees. The court martial accepted his guilty plea. Cruz, 24, is the eighth person to be indicted for abusing Iraqi detainees in an affair which provoked worldwide outrage when it broke in April. He was the second to be sentenced.

In emotional testimony before being sentenced, Cruz told the court he took full responsibility for his actions, but he offered few explanations. "I knew my actions were wrong," he said. "There's no way to justify it."

As the first intelligence operative to be tried, Cruz's case is significant because the Pentagon has said the abuse was the work of a few bad military police acting on their own accord, and not on the orders of intelligence officers.

Defence lawyers for some indicted soldiers say intelli-



A sketch released by the US army shows Armin J. Cruz during his court martial in Baghdad. (AFP)

gence officers ordered military police to "soften up" prisoners ahead of interrogation, and that senior commanders knew about or even sanctioned the abuse.

Stephen Karns, Cruz's civilian lawyer, described his client as a "war hero" who acted out of character in Abu Ghraib because he was suffering from traumatic stress following a mortar attack which blew up a close colleague.

Karns said he was disappointed with the bad-conduct discharge and would appeal. "I

believe he can still make contributions to the US army... I think the army is losing a lot in this soldier."

In a report into the abuse by US army Major General George Fay issued last month, Cruz was identified as having taken part in the mistreatment of three prisoners at the jail. A photograph taken on October 25, 2003, showed Cruz and two other intelligence soldiers standing in the background as military police abused three prisoners in the foreground.

Indians set free

KUWAIT CITY/NEW DELHI, Sept. 1. — The three Indians held captive by Iraqi militants since 21 July arrived in Kuwait City tonight after their release. The reprieve comes a day after the gruesome killing of 12 Nepalese.

The hostages — Antaryami, whom the abductors had threatened to kill if their demands were not met, Tilak Raj and Sukhdeo Singh — were received by the Indian ambassador, Mr Swashpawan Singh, at Kuwait international airport. They are expected to be flown home tomorrow.

They, along with four other freed hostages — three Kenyans and an Egyptian — were hugged and presented flowers by the staff of Kuwait and Gulf Link transport company for which they worked. The seven were driving trucks in Iraq when they were taken hostage by a militant group *Islamic Secret Army — Holders of Black Banners*.

KGL said they paid \$1 million as ransom to the kidnapers and that they had not ceased operations in Iraq. However, according to a source in the MEA, no money was paid as ransom for the men but "sustained pressure" worked to earn their reprieve. The employers had to make a public commitment to end operations in and leave Iraq.

"It is a matter of pride for all of us that our people have been released in a



manner consistent with our policies and without compromising our national interest or sacrificing any of our principles," said the external affairs minister, Mr Natwar Singh.

It was KGL which conducted the protracted, now-on, now-off negotiations with the shadowy group of Iraqi militants, first through a tribal chief, Sheikh Hisham al-Dulaimi, and later, directly.

The Indian government did not directly negotiate with the abductors, but pushed KGL and maintained its own back channel contacts, and sent a special envoy, Mr Talmiz Ahmed, to Baghdad to assist the embassy there, headed by Ambassador Brij Bhushan Tyagi.

Reports of the release of the men firmed up after *Al-Arabiya* television channel broke the news, but the government waited until they were in the Indian embassy's custody in Baghdad before confirming their release.

Both the President and the Prime Minister have been informed. — SNS & PTI

Kathmandu erupts



Sudeshna Sarkar in Kathmandu

Sept. 1. — At least two persons were killed and 46 injured in clashes with police today when people came to the streets to protest against the killing of 12 workers in Iraq by Islamic militants. The Jama Masjid, the country's biggest mosque located near the Narayanhity Palace, was set on fire by hordes of youngsters who charged the government with not doing enough to secure the release of the hostages. "We want revenge," they cried as they broke windows, set fire to carpets and parts of the mosque which was deserted at that time.

Two other mosques in Kathmandu and one each in Jhapa and Birtamod near the Indian border were also attacked. Nepalese information and communications minister Mohammad Mohsin confirmed that demonstrators tried to dismantle a mosque here today. Burning pages of holy books lined the road as security forces, far outnumbered by the crowd, lobbed teargas shells to keep them at bay.

A home ministry spokesman said one of the demonstrators, who sustained bullet injuries near the Egyptian Embassy, died while undergoing treatment. Another died at Ratnapark in clashes with riot police, adds PTI. An indefinite curfew has been imposed in Kathmandu city and parts of Lalitpur district from 2 p.m., with the government asking people to stay indoors and authorising the army to shoot at sight.

Shops, offices and educational institutions were closed as mobs indiscriminately targeted the offices of manpower agencies in the capital, breaking doors and windows and setting documents and furniture on fire. They demanded the resignation of the minister for foreign affairs and stringent punishment for the recruitment agency brass that had sent the workers to Iraq while hiring them for assignments in Jordan. The government is yet to announce action against Moonlight Consultants, the manpower agency that had hired the 12 Nepalese killed by the *Ansar al-Sunna Army* militants in Iraq.

Announcing a compensation of NRS 10 lakh to the kin of each victim, the government said that Thursday would be observed as a day of national mourning. Prime Minister Mr Sher Bahadur Deuba appealed to all to observe "tolerance and patience".

Air Sahara, which was to have launched its Kathmandu flight today, postponed it yet again. Indian Airlines too cancelled its Delhi run though Jet Airways flights were on schedule. Pakistan today condemned the reported attack on a PIA office in Kathmandu and the PIA flight to Kathmandu tomorrow has been cancelled.

The Confederation of Nepalese Industries, a private business lobby that was to host a two-day conference from Thursday, postponed the meeting. Several participants, including Dr Mahathir Mohamad, former Malaysian prime minister, and Mr EP Elangovan, Indian MoS for commerce, also cancelled their trips. India today expressed deep shock over the killing of the 12 Nepalese. The European Union heads of mission in Kathmandu have also called for a ceasefire.

Tension fears along border, page 4



(Far left) The seven truck drivers taken hostage in Iraq, including the three Indians, share a meal prior to their release on Wednesday in Fallujah. On the same day, (top left) a Nepalese mob demonstrates outside the burning offices of Qatar Airways while (top right) protesters shout slogans standing on the dome of the country's largest mosque in Kathmandu. — AFP

12 Nepalese hostages killed before cameras

Associated Press
Dubai, August 31

A WEBSITE linked to an Iraqi militant group showed a video of what was purported to be the killing of 12 Nepalese workers by Iraqi militants who had kidnapped them.

The Nepalese Foreign Ministry said it could not confirm the report of the hostages' deaths. The 12 had been reported kidnapped on August 20. The video showed a masked man in desert camouflage apparently slitting the throat of a blindfolded man lying on the ground. The blindfolded man moans and a shrill wheeze is heard, then the masked man displays the head to the camera before resting it on the decapitated body.

Other footage showed a man firing single shots from an assault rifle at the back of the heads of 11 others. Blood seeps from their bodies on to the sand.

A statement on the website signed "Ansar al-Sunna Army" vowed to keep fighting the Americans in Iraq. "America today has used all its force, as well as the help of others, to fight Islam under the so-called war on terror, which is nothing but a vicious crusade against Muslims," the statement said. At the end of the four-minute video, a man reads another statement off-camera, vowing to fight



This picture taken on Tuesday from the Islamist Army of Ansar al-Sunna website shows the bodies of Nepalese hostages at an undisclosed location.

the Iraqi government. "We will work on exterminating them until the last fighter," he said.

Iyad Mansoor, director-general of the Morning Star Company, a Jordan-based services firm which had contracted the 12 Nepalese workers for jobs in Iraq, said he had no information on the beheading of the Nepalese

captives. "I'm shocked to hear such news," he said. "The last I heard was that the Nepalese government was in contact with Iraqi clergymen and others in an effort to set the 12 men free."

"Do not sympathise with this impure group, they have left their country and travelled thousands of kilometres to work with the

crusader American forces and to support it in its war against Islam and holy warriors," the Ansar al-Sunna statement said. The statement addressed the Nepalese government "and other lap dogs of the Jews and the Christians", saying executions would be the fate of "every agent, traitor and spy".

In an August 20 Web statement,

the little known Ansar al-Sunna Army claimed to be holding 12 Nepalese hostages and demanded Nepal stop sending workers to Iraq. The same group later claimed to have kidnapped and beheaded an Arab-American it said was a CIA spy, but the US Embassy in Baghdad had said it was unaware of an American hostage.

Muqtada calls for Frenchmen's release

Associated Press
Baghdad, August 31

REBEL SHIA cleric Muqtada al-Sadr's lieutenants on Tuesday called for the release of two kidnapped French reporters, denouncing their abduction as "inhumane and immoral".

Christian Chesnot and Georges Malbrunot were shown on a video released by an pan-Arab television station Al-Jazeera early on Tuesday pleading with French President Jacques Chirac to save their lives by giving in to militants' demands to rescind a headscarf ban, a move France has ruled out.

"We believe such acts defame Islam and Muslims in general," said Ali al-Yasiri, an al-Sadr representative in Baghdad. "To fight in a battlefield is okay, but to kill a civilian or journalist is blasphemy." "I call upon the kidnappers to immediately release the French journalists," another al-Sadr official, Sheikh Youssef Al-Nassiri, said.

The Islamic Army of Iraq, be-

lieved to be a Sunni group, has said it took the foreigners in a bid to force France to scrap plans to prohibit the wearing of headscarfs in public schools. Al-Yasiri also condemned the law, but said there were other ways to force Paris to backpedal, such as boycotting French goods or persuading Arab nations to suspend diplomatic ties. A claim of responsibility was also issued in the group's name for the kidnapping of Italian journalist Enzo Baldoni, who was killed last week after Italy ignored a demand it pull its soldiers from Iraq.

Al-Sadr helped secure the release earlier this month of the British journalist James Brandon and the American journalist Micah Garen after they were kidnapped by Shia militiamen. But he is not thought to have as much influence with Sunni Muslims.

Meanwhile, the French Prime Minister was this morning holding an emergency meeting of his government after the deadline for their execution was extended by 24 hours to Tuesday evening.

TRANSFER OF POWER

578 119

Will Iraq Become A Failed Country?

By SERGEI KARAGANOV

Nearly two months have passed since the formal transfer of power from the occupation administration to the interim Iraqi government led by Ayad Allawi, designed to launch the restoration of the state and normal life in that long-suffering country.

But the chances for success look slim. Far from stopping, terrorist attacks are growing in scale. Iraq has become the focal point of all kinds of terrorists prepared to do everything possible to keep the country uncontrollable and ungovernable, and to make it their base.

Flourishing fundamentalism

Of the many mistakes made by Washington after the military victory in Iraq, the worst were the ruination and dissolution of the Iraqi armed forces and the exclusion of Baath members from the country's government. The US destroyed the Iraqi state machinery and it is extremely difficult to restore it in conditions of chaos and a nascent civil war. Some national problems that the war let out of the bag have been eased, but new ones appear every day.

The Kurds have once more started to vie with the Arabs. The Sunnis and Shias again view each other as adversaries and new groups appear that kill or intimidate those who want to cooperate with the occupation authorities or the new government. Next on the agenda is the struggle for oil and for leadership in the current and subsequent Iraqi governments. There is a growing probability that Iraq

The author is the chairman of the Council for Foreign and Defence Policy of Russia

will become a failed country — or countries.

A surge in Islamic fundamentalism is becoming increasingly possible. Iraq was a secular state in the recent past, but now it has become dangerous for women to

presidential elections.

The Americans will try to leave Iraq as soon as possible, though they deny such plans. They will do it after the presidential election and here are their arguments:



appear in public places with open faces. Fundamentalism of all stripes is flourishing in conditions of instability, desperation, anarchy and general humiliation.

Fleeing Americans

The Iraqis cannot hope for international assistance: everybody wishes them and their country well but hardly anybody wants to help. They either stint money or lack the necessary political will. Besides, some of the US allies will help only in word, trying to turn the political defeat of the US into the personal defeat of George Bush at the autumn

* we gave the Iraqis freedom and now it is their turn to use it;

* the longer we remain in Iraq, the worse we will be treated there;

* we must not create a dependency complex in the Iraqis.

In the worst-case scenario, the Americans will say that the Iraqis are not ready for freedom and democracy. If the Democrats win the elections, the US retreat from Iraq will be even more complicated, as the voters view them as pacifists. But they will leave Iraq anyway.

The Americans will continue their attempts to shift part of the responsibility for Iraq onto Nato

(which does not need it) and the UN. The situation will become more complicated with the modernisation of the Middle East, though the region badly needs it. The first modernisation attempt fell through.

But enough of the dark side. The transition of power to the Iraqi people is a positive thing. It is also good that a considerable section of the ruling class in the US has come to their senses. Americans are speaking about a new leadership strategy based on the involvement of allies, the key states of the world. The UN has proved its worth, too, though its internal weaknesses have not been eradicated and it should be reformed.

How to help Iraq

We must think, react to developments and help the Iraqis, for example, by inviting Iraqi specialists and giving Iraqi students a chance to be educated in Europe and Russia. We must also prevent the Americans from leaving Iraq completely, as this would guarantee Iraq's ruin.

We may use the Iraqi settlement to resume discussions on the creation of a regional security system modelled on the OSCE and supported by the great powers, including Russia.

And the last but not the least, we must preclude the very possibility of any rumour that the civilised world, whose most powerful country made a mistake and suffered a political defeat, has taken fright and will retreat in the war against terrorists and all kinds of fundamentalists. Civilisation and enlightenment have no right to make such a mistake; otherwise the Iraqi tragedy will become a global one.

Threat to historic sites

By Zainab Bahrani

THE DESTRUCTION of the Bamiyan Buddhas by the Taliban was met with an outcry in the United States, Britain and the countries that form the coalition in Iraq. Yet the coalition forces can now claim, among other things, the destruction of the legendary city of Babylon.

Ironically, the bombing campaign of 2003 had not damaged archaeological sites. It was only in the aftermath, during the occupation, that the most extensive cultural destruction took place. At first there was the looting of the museums under the watch of coalition troops, but that was to be followed by more extensive and active destruction.

Active damage of the historical record is ongoing at several archaeological sites occupied as military camps. At Babylon, I have seen the continuing construction projects, the removal of and digging into the ancient mounds over the past three months, despite a coalition press release early in June stating that work would halt, and the camp would be removed.

A helicopter-landing zone, built in the heart of the ancient city, removed layers of archaeological earth from the site. The daily flights of the helicopters rattle the ancient walls and the winds created by their rotors blast sand against the fragile bricks. When my colleague at the site, Maryam Moussa, and I asked military personnel in charge that the helipad be shut down, the response was that

it had to remain open for security reasons, for the safety of the troops.

Between May and August, the wall of the Temple of Nabu and the roof of the Temple of Nimrah, both sixth century BC, collapsed as a result of the movement of helicopters. Nearby, heavy machines and vehicles stand parked on the remains of a Greek theatre from the era of Alexander of Macedon.

Coalition forces are doing little to prevent the widespread looting and destruction of Iraq's world-famous historical sites.

The Minister of Culture has asked for the removal of military bases from all archaeological sites, but none has yet been relocated.

Iraq is ancient Mesopotamia, otherwise called the "cradle of civilisation." It has more than 10,000 listed archaeological sites, as well as hundreds of medieval and Ottoman Muslim, Christian, and Jewish monuments. The coalition did not establish a means of guarding the sites, though they would be protected in any other country rich in antiquities. As a result, archaeological sites are being looted to an extent previously unimagined.

The looting supplies the appetites of an international illicit trade in antiquities, and many objects end up in places like Geneva, London, Tokyo and New York. The lack of border

controls has only added to the ease with which the illegal trade in Mesopotamian artefacts functions. The looting leaves the sites bulldozed and pitted with robber holes. Ancient walls, artefacts, scientific data are all destroyed in the process.

But it is not only the stolen artefacts that are lost. The loss of this data is the loss of the ancient history

and where power could be maintained, was an abandoned and bombed building that had previously been a Ba'athist officers' club. In Iraq, where it is not unusual for temperatures to soar up to 60C in summer, and where the Coalition Provisional Authority never managed to restore the electrical power to the country, this was no small feat.

The power in Baghdad (outside the U.S.-occupied presidential palace and embassy buildings) is available, sporadically, about nine hours a day, if they should thaw, the documents will be destroyed. The conservation process needs to be done in a time- and climate-controlled manner if the archive is to be saved.

In the midst of the disasters of Iraq under occupation, the condition of its cultural heritage may seem a trivial matter. But, as a historian of antiquity, I am painfully aware that there is no parallel for the amount of historical destruction that has taken place over the past 15 months in Iraq. The Geneva and Hague conventions make the protection of heritage the responsibility of the foreign powers during occupation. Instead, what we have seen under the occupation is a general policy of neglect and even an active destruction of the historical and archaeological record of the land. — ©Guardian Newspapers Limited 2004

(Zainab Bahrani is professor of ancient near eastern art history and archaeology, Columbia University, New York.)

India enjoys good relations with the USA and Iran and is ideally suited to bringing about a rapprochement between the two countries

US-IRAN DISCORD

25-8

By HARSH V PANT

29/8

IRAN is once again at the centre of the foreign policy debate in the USA. The final report of the commission investigating the 11 September, 2001 attacks has unearthed evidence regarding the long-standing relationship between Al Qaeda and Iran, especially the fact that Iran allowed at least eight of the 19 hijackers to cross over from Afghanistan the year before the 9/11 attacks without putting a stamp on their passports. Though the CIA has made it clear that there is no conclusive proof of a connection between Iran and the 9/11 attacks, pressure is mounting on the Bush Administration to clearly enunciate its Iran policy. While many conservatives are calling for a more aggressive policy of trying to bring about a regime change in Tehran, a new report from the highly influential Council on Foreign Relations argues that it is in the interest of the USA to undertake a "selective political engagement" with the current regime in Iran rather than waiting for its downfall.

It is unlikely that despite this renewed debate on the USA's Iran policy, the Bush Administration will come out with a clearly articulated policy because of the presidential elections in November. However, this debate can have important implications for India's relationship with Iran as the USA is a major factor in bringing the two nations close as well as significant constraint in the further strengthening of bilateral ties between the two.

The unipolar nature of the current international system is one of the most significant factors along with India's need to counter Pakistan's influence in the Islamic world. Indo-Iranian relations have evolved to a point where there are even reports of an India-Iran strategic accord allowing India the use of Iranian military bases in the event of an outbreak of tensions with Pakistan. Although the NDA government had virtually given up on the plan for a trans-regional oil pipeline between India and Iran primarily due to

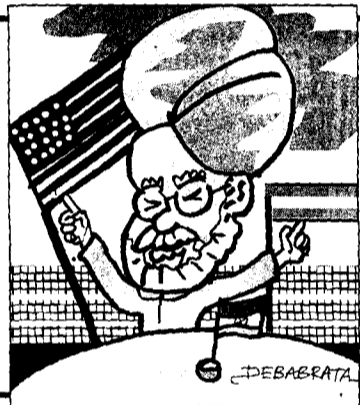
The author is a research fellow at the University of Notre Dame, Indiana, USA

concerns about Pakistan's ability to guarantee the security of such a pipeline, the UPA government seems to be keen to revive the proposal.

During President Khatami's visit to India in January 2003, both India and Iran were categorical in their rejection of the US stand on Iraq, arguing that the sovereignty and integrity of a nation should not be violated. The very fact that Iran's President was visiting India a time when the USA was positioning

Iran despite Iran having the capability to pose a significant threat to the US interests in the Persian Gulf. Moreover, after 11 September, 2001, Iran was also designated a member of the "axis of evil" that the USA considers as a state supporting and sponsoring Islamic terrorism. As a consequence, Iran's international isolation has increased tremendously in recent years with major states trying to toe the US line in their dealings with Iran.

After 9/11, Iran was designated a member of the "axis of evil" that the US considers as a state supporting Islamic terrorism



itself to attack Iraq, resulting in turmoil in West Asia, also demonstrated India's rather subtle attempt to distance itself from the US foreign policy vis-à-vis West Asia.

The absolute US dominance of the post-Cold War international order has made all the major second-tier states like Russia, China, India and Iran rather uncomfortable. Although they are in no position to challenge the US predominance in any significant measure, they have made attempts to upgrade their bilateral relations. Iran, however, faces different set of problems as its relations with the USA remains difficult to manage. While the relationships of countries like Russia, China and India with the USA have improved dramatically in recent times, the US posture towards Iran remains hostile.

After the defeat of Iraq in the Gulf War of 1991, the focus of the US foreign policy in the Gulf shifted to containing Iran and its Islamic revolutionary beliefs. The increased US military presence in the Persian Gulf and the economic isolation of Iran have made matters worse for

Moreover, after the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime in Iraq, Iran feels increasingly hemmed in by the US presence in Iraq and Afghanistan, with US forces just 300 miles from Tehran on the Iraqi border and flanking Iran to the east in Afghanistan. The USA has also put Iran on notice on a host of issues ranging from its nuclear weapons and missile programs to its harbouring of Al-Qaeda operatives.

India's relations with the USA, on the other hand, have improved dramatically in recent years. There are many in India and the USA who see both countries as natural partners because of their converging interests and vibrant democratic institutions.

The USA has also made in recent years made its interaction with India broad-based as opposed to an exclusive focus on issues related to nuclear proliferation and arms control, which had been the focus of Indo-US relationship for almost 30 years.

US relations with Iran have deteriorated considerably in the last few months. The USA has

accused Iran of giving sanctuaries to top Al-Qaeda leaders and of making attempts to destabilise post-war Iraq by trying to position a pro-Tehran Shia regime in Baghdad. More significantly, the declaration last year by Iran that it would reprocess spent nuclear fuel and mine uranium to meet a growing demand for electricity has added to tensions. The USA strongly believes that Iran's announced plans are a pretext to develop nuclear weapons. It has been at the forefront of putting pressure on Iran to come clean about its nuclear programme and has demanded strong action by the international community against Iran's clandestine nuclear activities.

As a consequence, while India seems to be getting closer to the USA, Iran is moving further apart. India will have to do a careful balancing act to make sure that its relationship with Iran does not impinge upon its relationship with the sole superpower in the international system. Though ideally India would like to preserve healthy relations with both, Iran and the USA, ideal situations are hard to come by in the topsy-turvy world of international relations. If Washington decides to put pressure on India on its relations with Iran, it would be rather difficult, it not impossible, for India to maintain the current trend in Indo-Iranian relations.

India, on its part, can play a significant role in bringing the USA and Iran together in case the two decide to engage each other. India enjoys good relations with both and can also sympathise with the strategic concerns of both. Just as India's nuclear weapons capability evolved in response to the South Asian environment, Iran's need for nuclear weapons emerges from the highly volatile strategic environment it faces in the Middle East.

On the other hand, US concerns with nuclear weapons falling in the hands of terrorist organisations is also a possibility that India has to contend with in neighbouring Pakistan. This makes India ideally suited to bringing about a rapprochement between Iran and the USA.

AL-SADR MILITANTS HAND OVER KEYS TO AL-SISTANI AIDES AFTER PEACE AGREEMENT

Najaf ultras surrender shrine

Associated Press

NAJAF, Aug. 27. — Militants filed out of the revered Imam Ali Shrine and turned its keys over to representatives of Iraq's top Shi'ite cleric today following a peace agreement to end three weeks of fighting in this holy city.

The hand over of the keys to one of the holiest Shi'ite sites — which the militants have been using as a hideout — was a symbolic, yet crucial, step in ending the bloody crisis.

"Now the holy shrine compound has been evacuated and its keys have been handed over to the religious authority," Mr Hamed al-Khafaf, an aide to Grand Ayatollah Ali Hussein al-Sistani, told Al-Arabiya TV. The transfer came hours after Al-Sistani brokered the peace deal.

Earlier today, thousands of Shi'ite pilgrims streamed into the shrine and filed out mixed with militants, who had been inside. The shrine later appeared empty and its doors were shut.

Iraqi forces had taken control of the Old City and

Meanwhile, radical cleric Muqtada al-Sadr issued a statement broadcast over the shrine's loudspeakers, ordering his Mahdi Army militia to lay down their arms and leave Najaf and neighbouring Kufa.

Al-Sadr accepted the peace proposal in a face-to-face meeting last night with Al-Sistani. Iraq's interim government also agreed to the deal and US forces ordered their troops to cease fire.

Earlier today, US soldiers looked on as people passed by in the streets leading to the shrine compound. A US army officer said the peace agreement "appears to be a final resolution. That's what it looks like right now".

Bodies found

Also today, police found 10 bodies near the shrine in a maverick religious court run by Al-Sadr's followers, said a senior police officer said.

He said the bodies were victims of the court's summary brand of justice, but Al-Sadr's followers said those killed were comrades who fell in the three weeks of fighting here.

Italian scribe killed in Iraq

BAGHDAD, Aug. 27. — Iraqi militants killed Italian journalist Enzo Baldoni after Italy refused their demand to withdraw its troops from the country, the Al-Jazeera reported early today. The station received a video yesterday that showed Baldoni apparently being killed, but declined to show it out of sensitivity to its viewers, said Mr Jihad Ballout, the station's spokesman. "Judging from the recording we received, it seems that the hostage takers carried out their threat to kill their hostage," Mr Ballout said.

Al-Jazeera's newsreader said the video also showed Baldoni after he was killed. Italian Premier Mr Silvio Berlusconi condemned the killing, but said Italian troops would remain in Iraq. "There are no words to describe this inhuman act ... We will be faithful to the commitments taken with the Iraqi provisional government." — AP



PEACE FOR THE BIRDS? Mahdi Army militiamen sleep inside the Imam Ali shrine in Najaf on Friday. — AFP

dozens of Iraqi police and national guardsmen were deployed around the shrine but did not enter it. US forces still maintained their positions around the holy site and jet fighters flew overhead.

Attack on Kufa mosque kills 74

Sadr blames US, Iraq govt for mortar attack ■ American forces deny hand

Agencies
Najaf, August 26

A TOTAL of 74 people were killed and more than 350 wounded in a mortar attack on Kufa's main mosque and a shooting at demonstrators on Thursday, as Iraq's Shia spiritual leader entered Najaf on a mission to "save" the battered holy city.

Hopes raised by his arrival were dimmed by violent incidents in Najaf's twin city of Kufa which killed 74 people, according to officials, and more attacks on pipelines in southern Iraq. "The Najaf hospital received 39 bodies and 255 wounded and the one in Kufa 25 bodies and 60 wounded," a health ministry official said.

In Kufa, Hussam al-Husseini, an al-Sadr aide, said one mortar shell hit the mosque compound itself and two others hit near the mosque gates. Others gave conflicting accounts of the number of explosions.

It was unclear who carried out the attacks in Kufa. US-led forces said they had not carried out any operations in Kufa for 24 hours and the interim government said it had called a ceasefire in Najaf.

Al-Sadr's aide, al-Husseini, said another mosque in Kufa had also been hit by mortar rounds on Thursday, but it was unclear whether casualties were reported. He blamed the mortar attack on the main mosque on American forces backing Iraqi troops in the city. "We held the interim government responsible for this bombing. We hold it responsible for this bloodshed," al-Husseini said.

Crowds of angry people were reported to have built up around the gates of the hospital where casualties were taken. "We were gathering outside and inside the mosque preparing to head to Najaf when two mortar shells landed, one inside the mosque and the other on the main gate," said one



Followers of radical Shia cleric Muqtada al-Sadr hit themselves on the chest while chanting slogans in protest against the attack on the main mosque in Kufa on Thursday.

man who was taking an injured friend to the hospital. "This is a criminal act. We just wanted to launch a peaceful demonstration," Hani Hashem said.

The governor of Najaf said neither US nor Iraqi government forces had carried out the attack. Blood was splattered on the pavement in a courtyard beside the mosque and a pair of sandals was left nearby. Shrapnel from the explosions tore small chunks out of walls and the pavement, but the compound did not appear to have suffered serious structural damage.

The bodies of another eight

people killed in the demonstration and 42 wounded people were transported to Diwaniya, about 50 km east of Najaf.

Meanwhile, a large crowd of people took advantage of the ceasefire suspending three weeks of fighting between Sadr's Mehdi Army and US and Iraqi government troops to force their way into the Imam Ali mausoleum, one of the holiest sites in Shia Islam, which has been held by the militia for four months.

Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani's arrival in Najaf with thousands of supporters in his wake triggered a 24-hour cease-

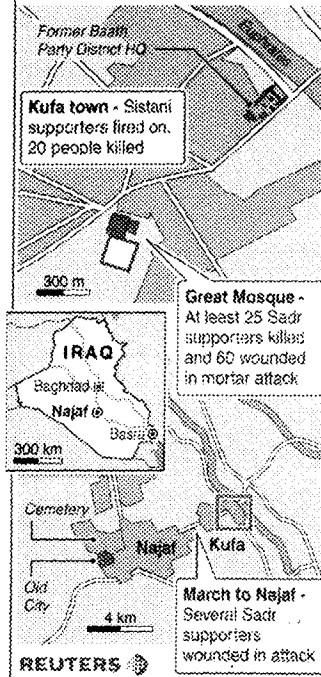
fire in the city where talks began with representatives of rebel cleric Muqtada Sadr.

Sistani, treated to a euphoric welcome since returning from medical treatment in London on Wednesday, has signalled that he wants all armed groups to disarm in Najaf and Kufa and all foreign troops to leave.

Talks between Sistani and Sadr's camps started almost immediately, said a spokesman for the ayatollah, but it was not clear if the two leaders themselves had met face-to-face as officials said they had 24 hours to find a solution.

IRAQ VIOLENCE

At least 45 people were killed in Kufa on Thursday as top Shi'ite cleric, Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani made his way from Basra to Najaf's Old City to try to persuade rebel cleric Muqtada al-Sadr's Mehdi Army militia to leave a sacred shrine



Assault suspended

A MILITARY offensive against Shia Muslim militiamen in Najaf has been temporarily suspended to allow for peace talks, the US Army confirmed on Thursday. The assault had been "temporarily suspended" to facilitate the return of Iraq's top Shia cleric Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani and allow for talks between his representatives and those of rebel cleric Muqtada Sadr, it said.

AFP, Najaf

NAJAF STANDOFF / ALLAWI DECLARES 24-HOUR CEASEFIRE

W. Asia
from

Al-Sistani, Al-Sadr aides hold peace talks

27/8

By Atul Aneja

40-16

MANAMA, AUG. 26. Iraq's top Shia spiritual leader, Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani, arrived in Najaf on Thursday in an attempt to end the three-week-old standoff between American forces and supporters of the firebrand cleric Moqtada Al-Sadr.

Talks between representatives of the Grand Ayatollah and Mr. Al-Sadr's aides have begun. U.S. forces, along with American-trained Iraqi soldiers, have besieged fighters from Mr. Al-Sadr's Mehdi Army inside the Imam Ali shrine in Najaf.

The negotiations are meant to end the crisis peacefully amid threats by the interim Defence Minister that the occupants of the mausoleum should surrender peacefully or face forcible eviction.

Amnesty offered

Seeking an end to the crisis, Iraq's interim Prime Minister, Iyad Allawi, declared a 24-hour ceasefire in Najaf so that the peace talks could proceed. He

also offered amnesty to the Mehdi Army fighters and safe passage for Mr. Al-Sadr, provided the inmates vacating the shrine surrendered their weapons.

Ayatollah Sistani arrived in Najaf from the southern city of Basra in a convoy, which was followed by thousands of his supporters. British occupation troops and Iraqi security forces escorted the vehicles, while helicopters hovered overhead to ensure the safety of the convoy.

Earlier, the spiritual leader was flown in to Kuwait from London, where he was recuperating from heart surgery. His 12-vehicle convoy crossed the Kuwaiti border and entered Iraq on Wednesday. Meanwhile, two mortar shells fell into a mosque compound in Kufa, killing at least 26 people who were part of a crowd preparing to leave for Najaf in anticipation of Ayatollah Sistani's arrival. Hundreds of people, heeding the Grand Ayatollah's earlier call to march on Najaf in order to save the 'burning' city, had gathered in

Kufa. Crowds of angry people thronged the gates of the hospital where the casualties were taken.

In another incident, the sound of heavy gunfire forced back over 2,000 people from a roadblock on the main route to Najaf.

Pipelines damaged

In a day of fast-paced developments, eight oil pipelines feeding two oilfields in southern Iraq were damaged in a bomb attack, the Dubai-based *Al-Arabiya* TV channel reported on Thursday. An official from Iraq's South Oil Company was quoted as saying that an explosive device went off at 9 p.m. local time on Wednesday under a bridge, which collapsed.

Eight parallel pipelines feeding Zubeir 1 and Zubeir 2 oilfields, about 20 km southwest of Basra were damaged, he said.

Traders were quoted as saying that world oil prices, which had been dropping after surging to record highs, had risen after the news.

THE HINDU

27 AUG 2004

45 killed, 170 hurt in attacks near Najaf

MICHAEL GEORGY
NAJAF, AUGUST 26

IRAQ'S top Shi'ite cleric arrived in Najaf on Thursday to try to end a bloody three-week uprising as tensions rose sharply following attacks in a nearby town that killed 45 people and wounded 170.

Grand Ayatollah Ali Al-Sistani drove into Najaf in a huge convoy. Scores of police brandished AK-47 rifles as they drove past thousands lining the streets. The violence in nearby Kufa came as Sistani's efforts to try to persuade fighters loyal to rebel cleric Moqtada Al-Sadr to leave Najaf's holiest Imam Ali shrine appeared to be gaining

momentum. Sistani would soon unveil a peace plan, his aides said.

Tens of thousands of Iraqis in cars and on foot, many appearing to respond to Sistani's call to rescue the holy city, were converging on Najaf from several regions, witnesses said. A mortar attack on Kufa's main mosque killed at least 25 Al-Sadr supporters as hundreds of his men gathered inside, officials said. Shi'ite marchers were fired on in Kufa around the same time and 20 were killed, a Reuters photographer said.

The photographer said he had seen 20 bodies under blankets. It was unclear who opened fire or who launched the mortar.

Mohammed Abed Al-Kadhem, a

doctor at a nearby hospital, said 25 dead and 100 wounded had been brought in from the mosque attack, and at least 10 dead and 70 wounded from the shooting. Other victims were taken to another hospital in the area.

An aide with Sistani on the journey from Basra said the 73-year-old Iranian-born cleric would unveil a plan to resolve the Najaf crisis. Meanwhile, Iraqi PM Iyad Allawi said he had ordered his forces to observe a 24-hour ceasefire in Najaf from 3 pm (1100 GMT) to help the talks.

In a statement, he said representatives of Al-Sadr had indicated they would accept the plan from Sistani. Allawi said Mehdi fighters would be offered an

amnesty if they gave up their weapons and left the shrine, and Al-Sadr would also be given safe passage if he ended the uprising. Military operations would resume 24 hours later if no agreement was reached, Najaf's governor said.

Sistani's peace plan will include getting the Mehdi militia out of the mosque and calling on US Marines encircling the shrine to leave, aides said.

Overnight, US warplanes unleashed a fierce attack on rebel targets in Najaf.

Al-Sadr has challenged the collegiate leadership of the Najaf clergy headed by Sistani and styled himself as the face of anti-US Shi'ite resistance. —Reuters



A man is carried into a clinic after the mortar attack. Reuters

নজাফের ইমাম আলি

মসজিদ ঘিরে অভিযান শুরু মার্কিন সেনার

নজাফ, ২৫ অগস্ট: প্রচণ্ড সংঘর্ষের পর মার্কিন বাহিনী আজ নজাফ শহরের ইমাম আলি মসজিদকে চার দিক থেকে ঘিরে ফেলেছে। মসজিদের মধ্যে প্রায় ৬০০ মাহদি সেনা রয়েছে বলে খবর পাওয়া গিয়েছে। গত চার মাস ধরে এই মসজিদই ছিল মাহদি বাহিনীর মূল সামরিক ঘাঁটি। মঙ্গলবার বিকালের মধ্যে ইমাম আলি মসজিদ ছেড়ে না গেলে মাহদি বাহিনীকে ধুয়ে-মুছে শেষ করে ফেলা হবে বলে হুমকি দিয়েছিলেন ইরাকের প্রতিরক্ষা মন্ত্রী হাজিম-আল-শালান। তাঁর দেওয়া সময়সীমা শেষ হওয়া মাত্র মার্কিন ও ইরাকি বাহিনী একজোট হয়ে বড়সড় অভিযান চালায়।

এ দিকে, আল জাজিরা টিভির খবর, জঙ্গিরা আজ শালানের দুই আত্মীয়কে অপহরণ করেছে। এক জনের নাম সালা হাসান লামি। তিনি প্রতিরক্ষা মন্ত্রকের সমর বিভাগের অধিকর্তা। একটি ভিডিওতে মুখোমুখি জঙ্গিদের সামনে তাঁদের হাঁটু গেড়ে বসে থাকতে দেখিয়েছে আল জাজিরা। তবে কোনও কথাবার্তা শোনানো হয়নি। জঙ্গিরা দাবি করেছে, নজাফে মার্কিন হামলা বন্ধ করে ধৃত সদর নেতা আলি মেইসিমকে ছেড়ে দিলে তবেই এঁদের মুক্তি দেওয়া হবে।

৫০০ ইরাকি সেনা মসজিদের বাইরে মোতায়েন রয়েছে। এই প্রথম নজাফে ইরাকি সেনা প্রবেশ করল। মার্কিন সেনা সূত্রে জানানো হয়েছে, ইরাকি সেনাই প্রথম মসজিদের ভিতরে ঢুকে জঙ্গিদের মোকাবিলা করবে। মসজিদের আশপাশের সমস্ত রাস্তা আটকে দেওয়া হয়েছে। এ দিকে, নজাফ রক্ষা করতে সমস্ত ইরাকিকে সেখানে মিছিল করে যাওয়ার ডাক দিয়েছেন ইরাকের প্রধান শিয়া ধর্মগুরু আয়াতোল্লা-আল-সিস্তানি।

পুরনো শহরের দিক থেকে মসজিদের পশ্চিম দিকের প্রাচীর

বরাবর মার্কিন বাহিনীর সাঁজোয়া গাড়ি, ট্যাঙ্ক ক্রমশ এগিয়ে আসছে। মসজিদের কয়েক মিটার পশ্চিমে, মার্কিন যুদ্ধ বিমান থেকে ক্ষেপণাস্ত্র ছোড়া হয়েছে। এ ছাড়া, মসজিদে কেউ ঢুকলে বা বার হলে তার উপর মার্কিন যুদ্ধবিমান থেকে গুলি ছোড়া হচ্ছে। পূর্ব ও দক্ষিণ দিকেও উপর্যুপরি গোলা ছুড়ে জঙ্গিদের প্রতিরোধ সম্পূর্ণ গুঁড়িয়ে দেওয়া হয়েছে। মার্কিন সাঁজোয়া গাড়ি মসজিদের ২০ মিটারের মধ্যে চলে এসেছে। কয়েকশো ইরাকি সেনা শহরের রাস্তায় টহল দিতে শুরু করেছে।

মার্কিন বাহিনী আজ ফালুজাতেও বোমা ফেলেছে। শহরের পূর্ব দিকে মার্কিন বিমান থেকে অন্তত ১৫ বার বিভিন্ন লক্ষ্যে বোমা ছোড়া হয়। গত সপ্তাহে জঙ্গিরা ইন্দোনেশিয়ার এক ইঞ্জিনিয়ারকে হত্যা করার পর ইন্দোনেশিয়া তার নাগরিকদের ইরাক ছাড়তে অনুরোধ জানিয়েছে।

সাদ্দামকে ঘৃষি-লাথি। অন্ধকার গর্তে কেউ লুকিয়ে আছে বুঝতে পারছিলেন সামির। মার্কিন সেনারা তখন গর্তের চারপাশ ঘিরে ফিলেছে, হাতে গ্রেনেড আর বন্দুক। অল্প সময়ের অপেক্ষা। তারপরেই গর্তের ভিতর থেকে হাত বাড়াল লোকটি, আত্মসমর্পণের ভঙ্গিতে। সেই হাত ধরে তাকে টেনে বার করেই— হতবাক সামির! আত্মগোপনকারী আর কেউ নয়, স্বয়ং সাদ্দাম হুসেন।

তিকরিতে ১৩ ডিসেম্বরের অভিজ্ঞতার কথা বলছিলেন সামির। সাদ্দামের ডেরায় হানা দেওয়ার আগে সামিরকেই অনুবাদক করে নিয়ে যায় মার্কিন সেনারা। সাদ্দামের সামনে দাঁড়িয়ে কী করলেন আপনি? সামিরের জবাব, “প্রাণভরে ঘৃষি-লাথি মারলাম আর গালাগাল দিলাম। বলতে চাইছিলাম, তুই আমাদের এই হাল করেছিস, এখনও তুই ইরাককে শান্তি দিবি না!” —রয়টার্স, পি টি আই

Peace talks fail as Najaf burns

Agencies
Najaf, August 22

HEAVY CLASHES erupted between US troops and Shiite militiamen in the Iraqi holy city of Najaf today after the proposed handover of the militia's shrine stronghold to the Shia religious leadership was suspended.

Fighters loyal to Shia radical leader Muqtada Sadr launched multiple attacks on US tanks, parked around 300 metres away from the Imam Ali shrine, as the reverberations of gunfire and mortar bombs could be heard from inside the mosque compound.

A car bomb detonated near a US military convoy outside Mosul on Sunday, the military said. Two children were injured in the blast, said Dr. Mohammed Ahmed of al-Jumhuri hospital. The bomb exploded as the convoy passed a road west of Mosul, 360 km northwest of Baghdad.

Overnight, US warplanes pounded the city, causing three large explosions near the mausoleum, as the US army confirmed military operations were continuing at the request of the Iraqi government.

American troops backing Iraqi forces in Najaf had scaled back their deployment yesterday, but today's clashes were more intense than the sporadic firing the previous day. Some two days after spokesmen for both Sadr and Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani announced the deal to hand over the keys to the shrine, which

the Mehdi Army have occupied since their April uprising, talks bogged down.

"We do not know how long it will take. It all depends on the situation and Sistani," Sadr's junior spokesman Sheikh Ahmed al-Shaibani said.

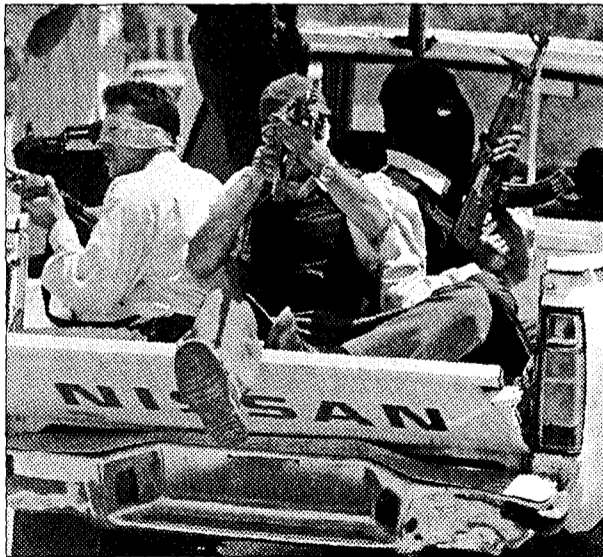
"The matter is suspended as of now, because we are awaiting the response from Sistani about forming the committee" tasked with carrying out a full inventory of the shrine's priceless works of art and alms.

Sistani has been reluctant to take back the shrine without ensuring that nothing is missing and the Mehdi Army is unwilling to surrender control amid any suggestion of impropriety.

Sadr's aides had earlier said that his militia would continue to guard the mosque after any handover, defying calls from Allawi to disband and vacate the mosque. A Sistani spokesman in London told Al Arabiya television "no specific time has been set" for a handover of the mosque's keys.

Meanwhile, US tanks have advanced to within 800 metres of the Imam Ali mosque. North of Baghdad, a suicide car bomb blew up near a convoy carrying Iraqi officials near the town of Baquba, killing two people and wounding eight, a police officer said.

The car bomber near Baquba, a hotbed of anti-US resistance, appeared to have been targeting Ghasan al-Ghadren, the town's deputy mayor, police said. The official was slightly wounded.



REUTERS
Masked Iraqi police officers patrol Najaf streets on Sunday.

Prisoners' hunger strike finds support in Palestine

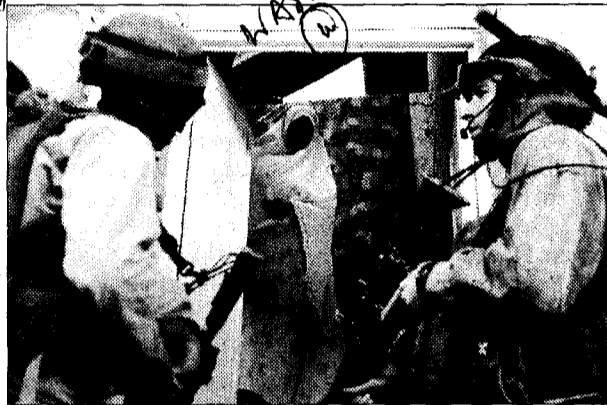
DAN WILLIAMS
JERUSALEM, AUGUST 22

THE number of Palestinians on a hunger strike in Israeli jails has almost doubled to 2,900 in the week since the protest was launched, the Prisons Service said on Sunday.

But Israel vowed not to budge on the prisoners' demands that wardens stop strip searches, allow more frequent family visits, improve sanitation and install public telephones. Seen by Palestinians as symbols of resistance to Israeli occupation, some 1,500 inmates began refusing food on August 15.

Israeli officials called the liquids-only fast a ploy by prisoners to secure easier communication with militant groups spearheading a four-year-old revolt and refused to negotiate. One minister said he did not care if they starved to death. "There are now around 2,900 prisoners taking part in the protest, but we believe it is waning," a Prisons Service spokeswoman said. "The hunger strike is being unevenly observed at 10 of our facilities. Around 40 prisoners have broken it."

Palestinian officials said about 3,200 prisoners had



Israeli soldiers in a house-to-house search operation, in the West Bank city of Nablus on Saturday. AP/PTI

joined the hunger strike. About 7,000 Palestinians, excluding common criminals, are held in Israeli jails.

A Palestinian lobby group said some of the inmates were in critical condition and accused the Prisons Service of withholding medical treatment. "Prisoners are in real danger," the Palestinian Prisoners Club said in a statement, calling on Yasser Arafat's Palestinian Authority to push harder for the cause of the strikers.

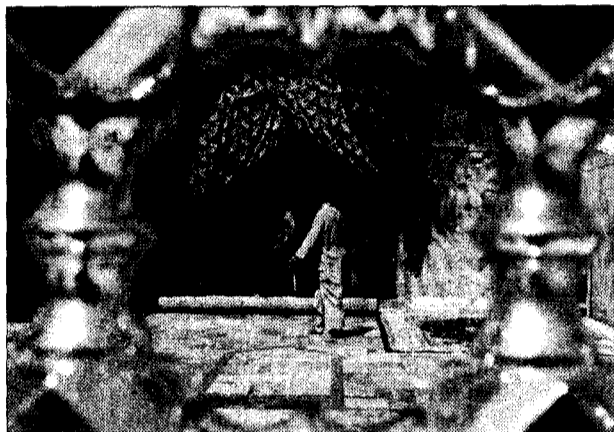
Israel denied withholding treatment. "Doctors conduct regular examinations of all the striking inmates," the Prisons Service spokeswoman said. "Several inmates admitted

themselves to prison clinics in what was clearly an attempt to seek legitimacy for them breaking the hunger strike." No prisoners were yet in a critical condition, she added.

The Prisons Service has withheld privileges from the prisoners since the start of the hunger strike and has said it might barbecue meat outside their cells to break their spirits.

Israeli television broadcast footage it said was filmed through a spy-hole and showed uprising leader Marwan Barghout, the most high-profile prisoner, eating in his cell. Qaraqe said Barghout only joined the strike last Wednesday. —Reuters

Al-Sadr militants in control of shrine



Shi'ite Muslims walk inside the Shrine of Imam Ali in Najaf on Saturday. — AFP

ASSOCIATED PRESS

NAJAF, Aug. 21. — Militants loyal to firebrand Shi'ite cleric Muqtada al-Sadr remained in control of Imam Ali Shrine, a revered Shi'ite shrine at the centre of the crisis in Najaf today, as they bickered with top Shi'ite leaders over how to hand the holy site over.

As the standoff dragged on, heavy clashes broke out near the cemetery and the Old City this afternoon between Al-Sadr's militia-men and US forces.

US troops came under mortar attack in the Old City and destroyed two militant mortar positions with gunfire and a heli-

copter attack. The violence in the city and a threatened government raid of the mosque risked inflaming the nation's majority Shi'ites. The crisis appeared on the verge of resolution yesterday with the insurgents' surprising decision to remove their weapons from the shrine, where they were hiding, and turn it over to Shi'ite clerics.

But the two sides were still debating how to arrange such a transfer today. Al-Sadr aides said they tried to hand the keys over to representatives of Iraq's top Shi'ite cleric, Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Husseini al-Sistani, who refused to accept them, demanding

Starting young

BAGHDAD, Aug. 21. — Ten-year-old Abbas is saving up his pocket money for a hand grenade. He wants an American one to throw at the huge US tanks that sit on every key crossroad of Sadr. He doesn't want an Iraqi one although, at £ 2, it is half the price. "The American is stronger. I'll attack Americans everywhere," he says with a smile.

In any other country, this could be dismissed as children's bragging. But Abbas is attending Friday prayers at al-Hikmeh mosque, the Baghdad headquarters of Muqtada al-Sadr, dressed in the white shroud of a martyr, a fighter ready for death.

— The Times, London

the shrine be evacuated first. Sheik Ali Smeisim, a senior Al-Sadr aide, said the militants wanted a delegation from Al-Sistani's office to first inspect the shrine and make sure its treasures were intact, so that Al-Sadr's followers would not be accused of stealing anything.

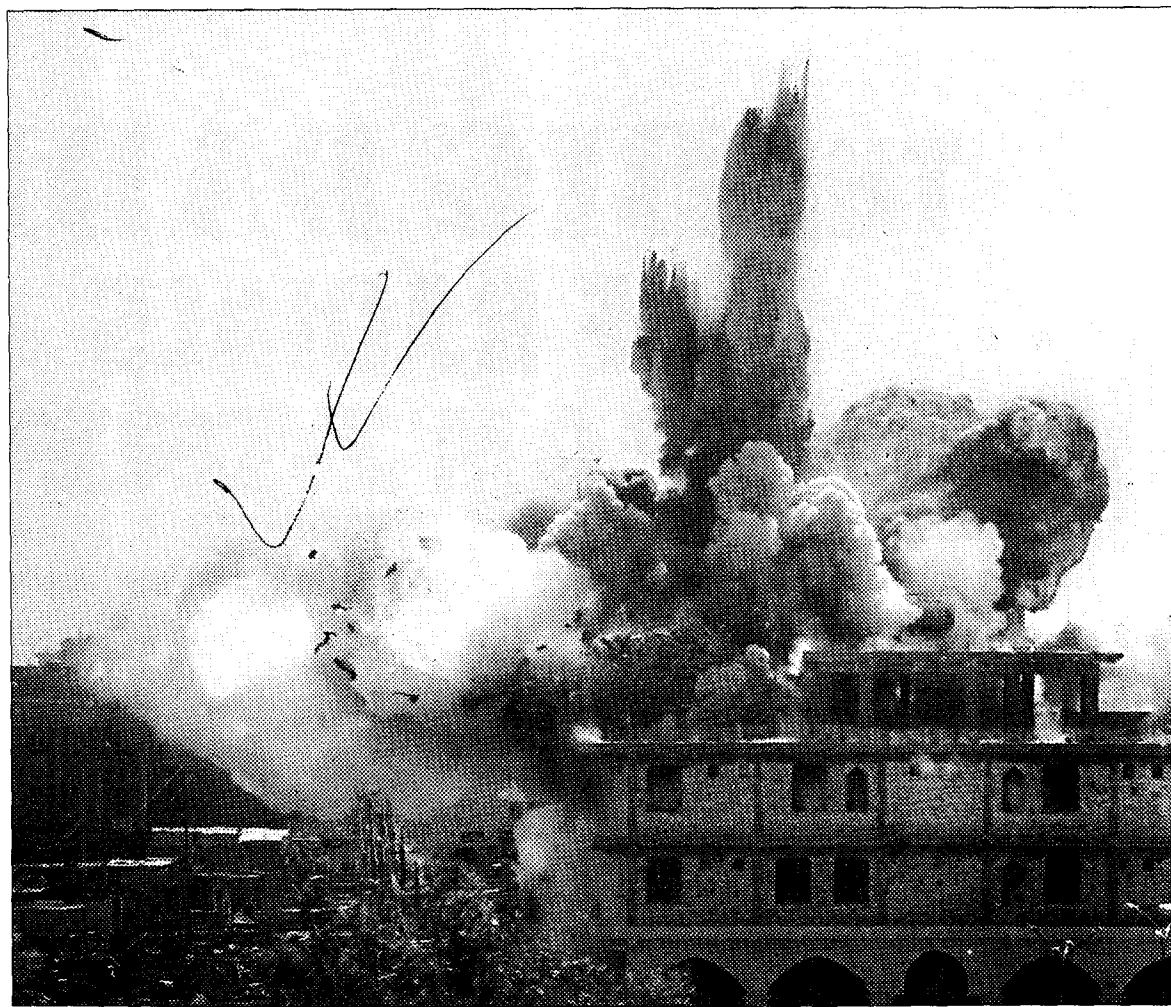
Only then would the militants leave, he said.

THE STATESMAN

22 AUG 2004

Muqtada bends a little

Cleric's men remove arms from Imam Ali shrine



A building explodes as the first bomb drops during a US aerial assault on insurgent targets in Najaf on Thursday. AP

Associated Press
Baghdad, August 20

MILITIAMEN LOYAL to rebel Shia cleric Muqtada al-Sadr on Friday removed their weapons from the Imam Ali Shrine in Najaf as part of an arrangement aimed at ending a two-week-old anti-US uprising centred on the holy site.

Iraq's highest Shia cleric, Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Husseini al-Sistani, agreed to take control of the shrine, which al-Sadr's Mehdi Army militia turned into a stronghold and refuge during their fight with US forces.

Al-Sadr aides were working out a handover of the keys to the site with al-Sistani followers. One aide said the keys could be given later on Friday. By Friday evening, militants had withdrawn all their weapons from the shrine compound, where civilians and unarmed militia members mingled in peace. In previous days, the walled compound had been filled with hundreds of chanting and bellicose gunmen.

The surprise pullback came a day after Iraq's interim Prime Minister, Iyad

MAN OF CONTENTION

→ Aged about 30, the plump, bearded cleric derives his authority from his late father Ayatollah Mohammed Sadeq al-Sadr, long an opponent of Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein

→ His father and two of his brothers were murdered in 1999, probably by agents of Saddam. An uncle was also killed in 1980 after he called for an Iranian-style Islamic republic

→ Sadr faces charges of murder, which he denies, over the killing of a rival, moderate cleric, Abdul Majid al-Khoei, who was hacked to death at the Imam Ali shrine in April 2003



→ He unleashed a Mehdi Army uprising across southern Iraq in April this year after the then US-led occupation shut down his newspaper and arrested a key aide. Hundreds of people were killed before he struck a truce with US forces in June

→ The latest rebellion began on August 5 and has spread to Sadr City, a Shia slum in Baghdad named in honour of his father, after Saddam's fall

Allawi, threatened to storm the shrine, a move certain to cause bloodshed and infuriate Shias across Iraq. On Thursday and overnight, US warplanes bombed militia positions in Najaf in fighting that killed 77 people and wounded 70 others.

But after daybreak, Najaf was the quietest in weeks, and Allawi backed off his threats, saying a peaceful resolution was

possible. "We are not going to attack the mosque, we are not going to attack Muqtada al-Sadr and the mosque, evidently we are not going to do this," Allawi said on Friday. "The olive branch is still extended, he can take advantage of the olive branch."

Al-Sadr has so far rejected the other main government demand — that he disband his Mehdi Army. But surrendering the

shrine would likely mean the end of the fighting that erupted on August 5. US forces had ruled out an American assault on the site and had faced tough fighting in a vast cemetery nearby from which al-Sadr fighters fired on American and Iraqi troops.

Interior Ministry spokesman Sabah Kadhim said on Friday that police entered the shrine and arrested 400 armed militants without incident. However, reporters who were inside the shrine throughout the afternoon said not a single police officer entered the compound and no arrests were made.

Handing over the shrine to al-Sistani's religious authorities appeared to be a compromise. "We don't want to appease the government. ... We want to appease the Iraqi people," an aide to al-Sadr said.

In a sermon read on his behalf in the nearby Kufa Mosque, al-Sadr said he wanted the religious authorities to take control of the Old City from his Mehdi Army, though he also called on all Muslims to rise up if the shrine is attacked.

Al Sadr rejects ultimatum to end Najaf standoff

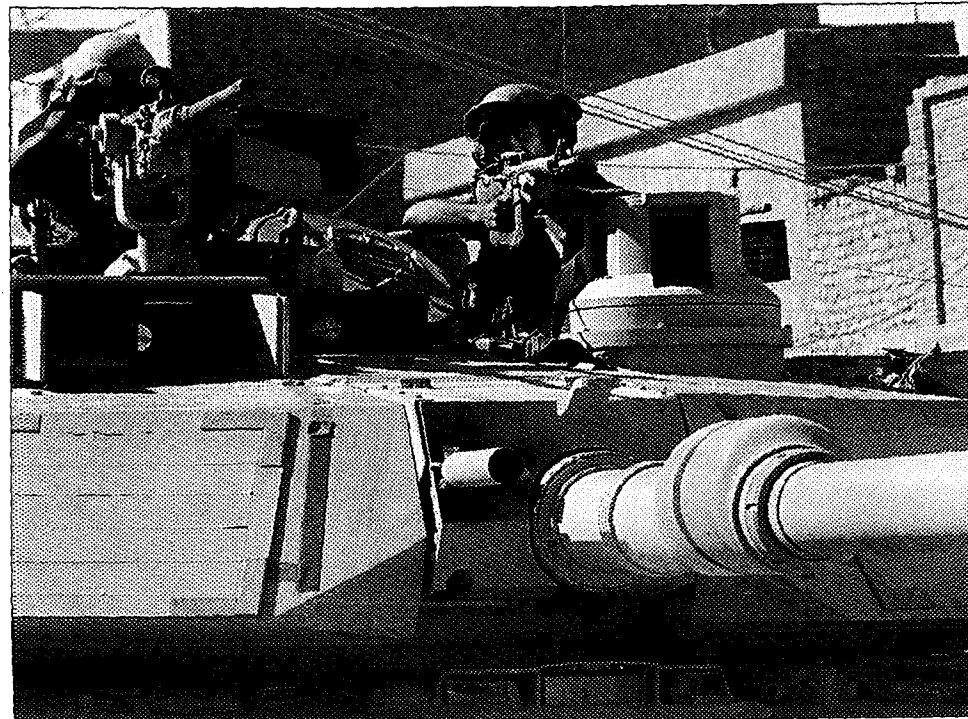
Iraq govt threatens to raid Imam Ali shrine ■ Damage to holy site could spark worldwide Shia uprising

Associated Press
Najaf, August 19

MILITANT SHIA cleric Muqtada al-Sadr on Thursday rejected a government ultimatum to disarm his militia immediately and pull them out of a revered Shia shrine here or risk a massive onslaught by Iraqi forces, an aide to the cleric said.

The news came soon after militants, presumably from his Mehdi Army militia, bombarded a Najaf police station with mortars rounds, killing seven policemen and injuring 31 others, hospital officials said. Explosions and gunbattles persisted through the streets of the city. Witnesses said a US warplane fired missiles at a hotel in a neighbourhood where Mehdi Army militants were known to take up fighting positions.

The cleric must also sign a statement saying he will refrain from future violence and release all civilians and Iraqi security forces his militants have kidnapped. In addition, al-Sadr must hold a news conference to announce he is disbanding the Mehdi Army. Al-Sadr quickly rejected the de-

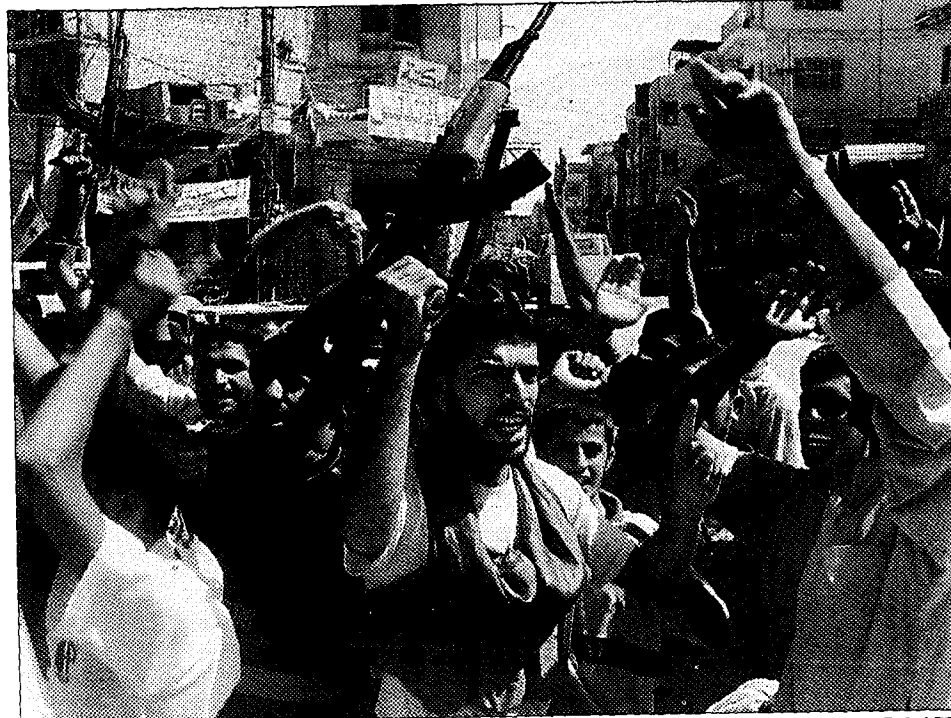


US soldiers patrol the deserted streets in the besieged city of Najaf on Thursday. Supporters of Shia cleric Muqtada al-Sadr chant slogans outside the shrine of Imam Ali in Najaf on Thursday.

mands, according to Haidar al-Tourfi, an official at al-Sadr office's office in Najaf. "Either martyrdom or victory," was the cleric's response, according to al-Tourfi.

A threatened raid on the Imam Ali Shrine, where the militants are holed up, could inflame the country's majority Shia population against the government, especially

if the holy site were damaged in the fighting. Other Muslim countries, including Shia Iran, have appealed to the government to search for a peaceful solution to the



AP & AFP

crisis. Abdel-Hadi al-Darrajji, an al-Sadr representative in Baghdad, warned that fighting in Najaf could "ignite a revolution all over Iraq". "We welcome any ini-

tiative to stop the bloodbath in Najaf," he said. "Otherwise the battle will move to other places." Government accusations that the militants had mined the shrine

compound and reports that women and children were among those inside could further complicate any raid. Iraqi officials have said a crack squad of Iraqi troops

Cleric's aides ready to die martyrs

MUQTADA SADR'S Shia Muslim fighters will happily die as martyrs, a senior aide of the militia leader said on Thursday, after an Iraqi minister ordered them to disarm or face a military offensive. To Minister of State Kassem Daoud's ultimatum, Sadr's senior aide Ali Smeisim said, "Daoud is not part of the negotiations. If there is a US conspiracy orchestrated by Secretary of Defence Donald Rumsfeld and US agents respond to it, then we'll be happy to be martyrs of this nation," he said.

AFP, Najaf

would lead any raid against poorly trained militants in the shrine, and US forces would not go into the compound. The Najaf violence has spread to other Shia communities, including Baghdad's Sadr City slum.

Tension mounts at Najaf shrine

By Atul Aneja

MANAMA, Aug. 19. Tension outside the Imam Ali shrine in Najaf has been mounting with an interim Iraqi Minister today issuing a 'final' ultimatum to the Shia leader, Moqtada Al-Sadr, who is inside the building to vacate or face military action.

The interim Minister of State, Kasim Daud, speaking in Najaf on Thursday, said that the Shia leader had to abide by key conditions or face military action, which, in his words was 'imminent'. He demanded that Mr.

Al-Sadr convene a press conference to announce that he would dismantle his Mehdi Army. Hundreds of Shia fighters under the banner of the Mehdi Army have been battling U.S. and Iraqi forces for nearly two weeks. The Imam Ali mosque, where 2,000 loyalists of Mr. Al-Sadr have formed "human shields", is under siege. Intense fighting has been reported from the old city, where the shrine is located.

Arms surrender

Mr. Daud said Mr. Al-Sadr must also hand over all light

and heavy weapons with the Mehdi Army in the various governorates. These weapons have to be given to the police and National Guard at special reception centres. Besides, Mr. Al-Sadr must submit the names of individuals who have been tried in his religious courts, as well as release all prisoners.

The Minister warned, "Otherwise the coming hours will be decisive. We have been preparing for a military offensive for five days to put an end to this crisis."

Responding to the threat, Mr.

Al-Sadr's spokesman said the Shia leader wanted to hold negotiations so that arrangements to enforce the demands to end his uprising could be made. It was, however, not clear whether Mr. Al-Sadr was prepared to disband the Mehdi militia and surrender weapons.

His spokesman for external relations had been quoted as saying on Wednesday that Mr. Al-Sadr's readiness to transform his force into a political entity did not mean that the Mehdi Army would disappear as an armed force soon.

Indicating the U.S.-backed interim Government's disinclination to hold further negotiations with the cleric, Mr. Daud said the time for negotiations was now over.

The interim Government accused Mr. Al-Sadr with 'trickery', alleging that he had not acted on his promise to disarm and abandon the shrine.

"We've had these kind of tricks before and the Iraqi people will not be deceived," the spokesman for the Interior Ministry, Sabah Kadhim, said in Baghdad.

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✓ 'SOVEREIGNTY' IN OCCUPIED IRAQ

THE SITUATION IN Iraq borders on the surreal. Over a 1000 delegates congregated in Baghdad to elect a legislative body that will oversee the functioning of the interim government until elections are held early next year. However, these supposedly sovereign institutions are so powerless that they function behind a protective cordon provided by the forces in illegal occupation of the country even as resistance groups hold sway over most of the population and large swathes of territory. Shia insurgent groups apparently control a huge slum in Baghdad as well as the inner neighbourhoods of most southern cities, while the Sunni triangle to the north and west of the capital has become a no-go area for outside forces. The most active resistance groups refused to participate in the Baghdad conference and the insecure conditions apparently deterred several other prospective delegates from risking the journey. Under these circumstances the conference was nothing more than a farcical exercise to set up a supposedly independent body that will rubber stamp the decisions of the interim government. This make-believe effort at democratisation might be lauded by the foreign sponsors of the current Iraqi set-up. However, even the interim Prime Minister, Ayad Allawi, did not apparently believe that the conference would serve any real purpose since he hardly participated after the opening session.

The interim Prime Minister's recent actions indicate that he prefers to be seen by his compatriots as a strong man rather than as a democrat. He appears to have calculated that the Iraqis will give their allegiance to a leader who promises to restore order even through recourse to ruthless measures where necessary. A confrontation in Najaf with forces loyal to the rad-

ical Shia cleric, Moqtada al Sadr, has provided Mr. Allawi with an opportunity to create such an image for himself. Mr. Sadr's militia, the Mahdi Army, has been given an ultimatum to disarm and disperse and warned that all available force will be used if it does not do so. While units of the United States Army and Marine Corps have penned Mr. Sadr and his followers inside the shrine of Imam Ali, they are unable to advance any further because of the fear of unintended consequences. This shrine is most sacred for Shia Muslims and if any damage is caused to it in the course of an attack, the reverberations will be felt far beyond Iraq. Mr. Allawi has tried to limit the fallout by declaring that military operations in the vicinity of the shrine will be carried out by Iraqi forces. However, this subterfuge is not likely to produce the desired result. It is well known that the army and other security forces that are being raised in Iraq do not have the training or the equipment required for undertaking such an operation; until now these forces have consistently refused to fight their own countrymen. The situation is such that most people in Iraq and elsewhere will believe that the local troops only provide a propaganda cover for actions taken by the foreign military contingents. Such an impression would have been reinforced after the interim government ordered all independent journalists to leave Najaf.

Mr. Allawi's effort to project himself as a decisive leader was undermined by his patrons in Washington when they forced him to roll back an amnesty offer. With his credibility in tatters, the interim Prime Minister apparently feels that he has to take drastic measures to prove he can deliver. Confronted with a choice, Mr. Allawi preferred to crush his own people rather than stand up to the occupiers.

Al-Sadr 'accepts' peace plan

Associated Press

NAJAF, Aug. 18. — Shi'ite cleric Muqtada al-Sadr today accepted a peace plan to end the fighting in Najaf that would disarm his militia and remove them from a holy shrine where they are hiding out, an Al-Sadr spokesman said. However, the cleric wanted to negotiate how the deal would be implemented.

Al-Sadr's decision came just hours after Iraqi defence minister Mr Hazem Shaalan said the government could raid the Imam Ali shrine as early as today to flush out the militants.

The cease-fire deal was first presented to al-Sadr's aides in Najaf yesterday by an eight-person delegation sent by the Iraqi National Conference. Al-Sadr declined to meet with the mediators personally.

The proposal demanded the cleric's militia drop its arms, withdraw from the shrine and transform itself into a political party in exchange for amnesty.

Sheik Hassan al-Athari, an official at Al-Sadr's office in Baghdad, said the cleric had agreed to the



An Iraqi woman shows the number of US tanks positioned near her house during an intensive battle between Al-Sadr militia and US forces near the Imam Ali shrine in Najaf on Wednesday. — AFP

plan, but wanted the delegation to return to Najaf to negotiate how it would be implemented and ensure his militants would not be arrested. He said al-Sadr had other minor conditions, but did not elaborate.

Clashes marked by gunfire and explosions continued in Najaf even after the agreement was announced today. The fighting in Najaf has killed six people and injured 23 since yesterday.

DELEGATES TELL MILITIA TO SURRENDER

Iraqi truce team lands in Najaf

Associated Press

BAGHDAD, Aug. 17. — A truncated delegation of Iraqis arrived in Najaf on helicopters today to present Shi'ite cleric Muqtada al-Sadr with a peace proposal aimed at ending the violent insurgency wracking the holy city.

The peace proposal, cobbled together by delegates at Iraq's National Conference, demanded that Al-Sadr's Mahdi Army militia put down its arms, leave the Imam Ali Shrine where it is holed up and join Iraq's political process in exchange for amnesty.

"This is not a negotiation. This is a friendly mission to convey the message of the National Conference," said delegation head Hussein al-Sadr, a relative of the cleric. "We want to change the Mahdi Army into a political organisation and to evacuate the shrine of Ali with the promise not to legally pursue those taking shelter there. This is what the government and all Iraqis want."

The eight-member delegation — seven of them Shiites — arrived at a US military base in Najaf this afternoon aboard two US

Annan ready to mediate

UNHQ, Aug. 17. — UN Secretary-General Mr Kofi Annan has agreed to play "a facilitating role" to help end the violence in Najaf provided "it helps and all sides agree to it", a UN spokesman said.

Mr Annan has spoken in this regard to US Secretary of State Gen. Colin Powell, Iran's foreign minister Mr Kamal Kharrazi and his new Iraq envoy Mr Ashraf Jehangir Qazi over the weekend, the spokesman said.

The announcement follows appeals by Iran and Saudi Arabia for UN intervention in Najaf. — PTI

army helicopters.

Earlier today, a much larger delegation of 60 conference members had planned to take a convoy on the 160 km journey to Najaf. That trip was delayed, and then eventually called off, because of security concerns.

After that delegation waited for more than seven hours to arrange a security escort, Hussein al-Sadr suddenly announced the smaller group would travel to Najaf by helicopter. "The government

wishes this delegation to achieve its goals to end the crisis forever, to protect the people and the holy sites," he said. "This is for the benefit of Najaf and Iraq and every Iraqi."

Al-Sadr aides said they welcomed the mission, but not the peace proposal. "The demands of the (National Conference) committee are impossible. The shrine compound must be in the hands of the religious authorities. They are asking us to leave Najaf while we are the sons of Najaf," said Sheik Ali Smeisim.

Mortar hits Baghdad

Seven people were killed and 47 injured after a mortar round hit a busy street in central Baghdad today.

The explosion on al-Rasheed Street, a commercial district in Baghdad, destroyed the front of a barbershop. Blood mixed with shards of glass littered the street as firefighters hosed down charred cars.

The attack occurred on the final day of the country's National Conference, that was considered a major target for insurgents who have waged violent attacks here for the past 16 months.

THE ST. ...

18 AUG 2004

Sadr urged to pull out by Iraqi forum

Associated Press & AFP
Baghdad/Najaf, August 16

DELEGATES AT Iraq's National Conference called on radical Shia cleric Muqtada al-Sadr to abandon his uprising against US and Iraqi troops and pull his fighters out of a holy shrine in Najaf.

"This is not right. We demand al-Sadr withdraw from the holy shrine because it's not the specific property of one person," Hussein al-Sadr, a distant cousin to the cleric, told the conference. "It belongs to everybody. Shrines should not be controlled by one man, regardless of his status."

The majority of delegates raised their hands in favour of Hussein al-Sadr's proposal to send a delegation to Najaf to meet with the militant cleric and ask him to stop fighting and join the political process. "The door is open to all Iraqis, regardless of their religion, ethnic background, to join the free political process," Hussein al-Sadr said.

Delegates said some of Muqtada al-Sadr's people attended the conference on Monday for the first time since it began on Sunday. The three-day national conference is an unprecedented forum for Iraqis of all ethnic and religious groups to discuss their visions for the future of this country, which is struggling with a Sunni insurgency, a renewed uprising by Shia militants and constant sabotage attacks on its reconstruction efforts.

Pope offers to mediate

THE VATICAN has offered to mediate to avoid further bloodshed and destruction in the besieged Shia holy city of Najaf, stronghold of rebel leader Muqtada Sadr, the Vatican said on Monday. "If asked, John Paul II would gladly accept a mediation role," the Vatican secretary of state, Cardinal Angelo Sodano, told Italian public radio.

AFP, Vatican City

In Najaf, two American soldiers were killed on Monday when troops came under attack by militiamen loyal al-Sadr.

Journalists asked to leave Najaf

The Najaf police chief ordered journalists to leave Najaf on Sunday. "I received orders from the interior minister who demands that all local, Arab and foreign journalists leave the hotel and city within two hours," General Ghaleb al-Jazairi said. "Journalists are no longer allowed to work in the city and must take their equipment and leave... because some people want to attack them," he said. "We have information that there is a 250 kilo car bomb targeting them," the fiery police chief added. Reporters Without Borders on Monday criticised the order.

IRAQ RESISTANCE / FRESH ROUND OF VIOLENCE FEARED

Truce talks in Najaf collapse

By Atul Aneja

MANAMA, AUG. 14. Talks to end a week of raging violence in Najaf have collapsed, reopening prospects of another round of conflict in the Shia dominated southern Iraqi city.

Mouwaffaq Al-Rubaie, the National Security Adviser in the U.S.-backed Iraqi interim Government, who had been involved in talks with supporters of the firebrand Shia cleric Moqtada Al-Sadr said today that he had tried to persuade the group to disarm and join the political mainstream. "I feel deep sorrow and regret to announce the failure of the efforts we have exerted to end the crisis in Iraq peacefully," he said. "We have been talking and discussing these matters for three days but reached no positive conclusion," he added. "After three days, my Government thought there was no use in continuing."

Ahmed al-Shaibany, a spokesman for Mr. Al-Sadr in Najaf, pinned the blame for the failure of the talks on the Americans. "There are particular points and demands we had that we specifically wanted the Americans to sign on, but they refused," he said.

Among those demands, he said, was the U.S. compensation for the families of those killed during fighting with the Americans.

The U.S. military has said that hundreds of people loyal to Mr. Al-Sadr have been killed in the Najaf fighting, but the guerillas say that the figure is exaggerated. Mr. Al-Sadr issued a list of demands on Friday, including an American withdrawal from Najaf and amnesty for all his fighters. In exchange, his followers would disarm and pull out of out of the revered Imam Ali shrine and Najaf's old city,

where they have taken refuge.

Mr. Al-Rubaie said he was leaving Najaf, but would return for fresh negotiations in case they materialised. He regretted that Mr. Al-Sadr had not directly participated in the talks, adding that it was his impression that some 'elements' were blocking his effort to hold a face-to-face meeting with the cleric.

Government's proposal

AP reports:

However, Mr. Al-Sadr himself did not participate in the talks and Al-Rubaie said he felt some 'elements' were hindering his efforts to hold a face-to-face meeting with the firebrand cleric. The Government negotiator said he had proposed that Al-Sadr's militia be disbanded and become a political movement.

"We have been talking and discussing these matters for three days but reached no positive conclusion," he said. "After three days, my Government thought there was no use in continuing."

Mr. Al-Sadr's aide, Sheik Ali

Smelsim, said both sides had agreed on all points, but the interim Prime Minister, Ayad Allawi, suddenly told the Government officials to break off talks and return to Baghdad.

"It is a conspiracy to commit a big massacre," he told the pan-Arab Al-Jazeera television station.

The battles ended on Friday as both sides respected a ceasefire during the negotiations.

Despite the halt in attacks, about 10,000 demonstrators from as far away as Baghdad arrived in Najaf on Saturday to show their solidarity with the militants and act as human shields to protect the city.

Samarra bombed

In other violence, U.S. warplanes bombed the largely Sunni city of Samarra, about 96 km north of Baghdad, after a series of clashes there.

The U.S. military said about 50 militants were killed in the operation, but police Maj. Saadoun al-Dulaimi said 12 persons were killed.



The Shia Muslim cleric, Moqtada al-Sadr, with his hand bandaged addresses his militiamen inside the shrine of Imam Ali in Najaf late on Friday in this TV grab. — AFP

Sadr sets riders for Najaf truce

Agencies
Najaf, August 13

SHIA MUSLIM rebel chief Muqtada Sadr laid down a list of conditions for an end to more than a week of deadly clashes pitting his militia against US troops and Iraqi forces, a spokesman said today.

Sheikh Ali Sumeisim spelled out the conditions — notably for the withdrawal of the US-led forces and handover of Najaf to the Marjayia, the Shia religious authority — during a news conference at a hotel in the besieged Shia holy city of Najaf in central Iraq.

If all multi-national forces, Iraqi police and soldiers leave Najaf and the Marjayia agrees to take responsibility for the city, "the Mehdi Army would pull out from Najaf", Sumeisim said, while stressing they refused to disarm.

All basic services must be restored in Najaf, and Sadr's Mehdi Army recognised as an ideological movement with its members allowed to carry weapons for self-defence, Sumeisim said. Those jailed for supporting the resistance, all imprisoned clerics and women must also be released from prison, the spokesman added.

Resistance fighters must no longer be persecuted and Sadr's organisation should be allowed to decide for itself whether it becomes a political movement, under the conditions.

"All followers of Sadr's movement should be under a legitimate constitution written by a free, elected government," Sumeisim said.

"Lastly, all efforts should be aimed at building a free, independent, unified Iraq," he said.

Meanwhile, a Mehdi Army leader described Sadr's health as satisfactory after he was lightly wounded early today while inspecting his fighters.

Iraqi officials and aides to a radical Shia cleric negotiated on Friday to end fighting that has raged in the holy city of Najaf for nine days, after American forces suspended an offensive against Muqtada al-Sadr's mili-



Women protest at the US assault on Najaf, outside the US headquarters in central Baghdad on Friday. REUTERS

tia, officials said.

Aides said al-Sadr had been injured by shrapnel, though Iraqi officials disputed that.

With the talks ongoing, the US military said on Friday that it had suspended offensive operations against al-Sadr's Mehdi Army militia, who are holed up the city's vast cemetery and the Imam Ali shrine, one of the holiest sites to Shia Muslims.

"We are allowed to engage the enemy only in self defence and long enough to break contact," said Maj. Bob Pizzitola, executive officer for the 1st Battalion, 5th Cavalry Regiment of the 1st Cavalry Division. "That was a blanket order for everybody."

"Hopefully the talks will go well and everything will be resolved peacefully," Pizzitola said.

Zarqawi group beheads Egyptian

AN ISLAMIST website on Friday broadcast a video which it said showed an Egyptian hostage in Iraq being beheaded by alleged al-Qaida operative Abu Mussab al-Zarqawi's terror group.

The victim, who gave his name as Mohammed Fawzi Abd Aal Metwalli, is seen encircled by three hooded gunmen and confesses in the videotape to having worked as a spy for US forces in Iraq. After the young man's statement, one of the men steps forward and cuts his neck with a long knife. The detached head is then placed on the victim's back.

"I am a citizen of the Arab republic of Egypt. I worked as a spy for the Americans in Iraq," said the man, who wore a flowery shirt, in the taped confession.

"The Americans gave me bugging devices which I attached to Iraqi citizens and mujahideen (Islamic fighters). Planes would then come to bomb the place. They gave me 45 devices, and 150 dollars for each one used. I would also bring women for the Americans at the (Baghdad) airport to be abused," he said.

AFP, Dubai

British scribe kidnapped and freed

Agencies
Basra, August 13

MILITANTS IN the southern city of Basra on Friday released a British journalist they had kidnapped and threatened to kill after aides to militant Shia cleric Muqtada al-Sadr demanded he be freed.

The journalist, James Brandon, was brought to al-Sadr's local office and freed. He held an impromptu news conference there and thanked the kidnapers and al-Sadr's aides for working for his release.

Brandon declined to talk about the circumstances of his release. Gunmen released a British journalist they had seized in the Iraqi city of Basra on Friday, witnesses said.

About 20 masked gunmen, some wearing police uniform, had stormed into the Al-Diyafa hotel and dragged the British journalist along with them.

James Brandon, who was working for Britain's *Sunday Telegraph* newspaper, was handed over to the Basra office of radical Shia cleric Muqtada al-Sadr. "I'm grateful to the Mehdi Army and I'm in good health now," Brandon told reporters shortly after his release.

Brandon, who had a black eye, said he was treated roughly at first, but then the mood of his captors softened.

Sadr's followers in the Mehdi Army militia have been involved in an outbreak of fighting with US forces in the Shia Muslim holy city of Najaf since August 5. Sadr's office had earlier intervened to help secure his release. James Brandon was in Basra filing materials for this Sunday newspaper among other projects

Militants take refuge in shrine

BAGHDAD, AUG. 2. The Iraqi Prime Minister, Iyad Allawi, called on Thursday on the Shia militants fighting the U.S. and Najaf to put down their weapons and leave the Imam Ali shrine where they have sought refuge.

Mr. Allawi's appeal, made in a statement read by Iraqi officials, came as the U.S. and Iraqi forces began a major operation in Najaf intended to defeat the militants.

The militants have been holed up in the shrine, one of the holiest sites in Shia Islam, during the fighting and the U.S. military accused them of launching attacks from the shrine compound.

"These places have never been exposed to such violations in the past," he said, adding that the violence has killed many innocent people.

"Our Government calls upon all the armed groups to drop their weapons and return to society," Mr. Allawi said. "We also call upon all the armed men to evacuate the holy shrine and not to violate its holiness."

Gunbattles

The sound of heavy gunbattles resonated throughout Najaf on Thursday, as the U.S. forces launched a major offensive to

would have to approve any operation at the shrine itself.

Explosions

Explosions shook buildings near the shrine on Thursday, as U.S. military vehicles entered the city from the north to the persistent crackle of gunfire.

A convoy of tanks, Humvees and other military vehicles rolled into the city carrying what seemed to be reinforcements and supplies.

The U.S. soldiers had cordoned off the area of Najaf that includes the cemetery, shrine compound (a huge, circular complex) and the old city, which is just south of the cemetery and shrine, but haven't moved in.

U.N. mission

At the U.N., the Security Council unanimously approved a resolution on Thursday to extend the U.N. mission in Iraq for a year, but how significant a role the world body can play remains in question because of continuing insecurity in the country. The U.N.'s new envoy to Iraq, Ashraf Jehangir Qazi of Pakistan, is expected to take up his post in Baghdad this week with a small team, giving the United Nations an official presence in Iraq for the first time since October. — AP

Islam, idealism drive Najaf's militants

By Rory McCarthy

NAJAF, AUG. 12. In a dirty alley on the outskirts of the old city of Najaf yesterday stood a crowd of militia fighters — the newest volunteer among them a bright young biology student called Ali.

He arrived seven days ago, bringing his Kalashnikov and a willingness to fight for the radical Iraqi cleric Moqtada al-Sadr. Around his head he wore a green, silk bandanna — an emblem of martyrdom.

On his chest was a green ammunition belt, filled with loaded magazines and rusted handgrenades. Written neatly on the belt was his name, address and telephone number. "In case I die, so they can reach my family," he said.

Young and poor

Like all of the fighters in this group on the front line, Ali (26), came across country from Amara, one of the several southern Iraqi towns where Mr. Sadr's Shia militia has fought in the past week, including yesterday when British troops said 10 fighters were killed.

Most who take up arms for the 30-year-old Mr. Sadr are young and poor. A minority, like Mr. Ali, are also well-educated.

They revile Saddam Hussein, who spent his time as leader persecuting them, but their eagerness to fight now is largely born out of frustration that the war and occupation has brought little material change to their lives. Added to this is their

avowed religious conviction. "I came for the defence of Islam," Mr. Ali said. He and the other 20 or so fighters in his platoon describe themselves as an "Islamic resistance".

Broad appeal

The other Shia parties hold little appeal for the fighters. "They just use Islamic slogans to cover up what they are doing," said Mr. Ali. "Syed Moqtada is a nationalist and he demands the right of the Iraqi people and the rights of the poor. He is the only one who didn't betray the people and cooperate with the Americans."

The fighters here in Najaf have rallied behind Mr. Sadr, the scion of a highly respected clerical family, because unlike all other major Shia political leaders he has so far shunned involvement in the pro-American governments.

Although his radicalism is rejected by many middle-class Shias, he carries a broad appeal for those looking for a revolutionary streak in the Shia faith in Iraq. It was his father's cousin, Mohammad Baqr al-Sadr, who began the activist, or "spoken", school in Najaf's Shia clerical community, advocating an Islamic state through revolution until he was killed in 1979.

Moqtada's father, Muhammad Sadeq al-Sadr, also acquired a reputation as a social activist until he was assassinated in 1999. Since last year's invasion his son has sought to claim that activist's mantle too.

Religious overtones

The entire scene was imbued with deep religious overtones and constant references to Imam Ali, Prophet Muhammad's son-in-law and a key figure in the Shia sect. "Ali is with you," they said to each other in greetings.

"Do you think I aim when I shoot this thing?" one machine gunner said to another fighter. "All these things are done by Imam Ali. All I have to do is carry the thing and pull the trigger and he will help me with my aim and bring down the helicopter. It is not me that does these things." — ©Guardian

Newspapers Limited 2004

Sadr defies Allawi order to quit Najaf

AGENCIES
NAJAF, AUGUST 9

RADICAL Shi'ite cleric Moqtada Al-Sadr on Monday defied a demand from Iraq's interim government that his militia quit Najaf, after US forces tightened their noose around the holy city in heavy fighting.

"The Mehdi Army and I will keep resisting. I will stay in holy Najaf and will never leave," Sadr said at Najaf's holiest shrine, the Imam Ali mosque. It was his first public appearance since the latest round of fierce fighting with US Marines erupted last Thursday.

Explosions and gunfire echoed on Monday from the heart of Najaf, Iraq's holiest Shi'ite Muslim city 160 km south of Baghdad. A new Shi'ite uprising has claimed hundreds of casualties in the past five days, piling pressure on interim PM Iyad Allawi.

"I will continue fighting," Al-Sadr told reporters. "I will remain in Najaf city until the last drop of my blood has been spilled."

Though, government officials had said many of those involved in the Najaf violence were criminals and implied they were not true acolytes of the popular Shiite firebrand, Al-Sadr claimed the militants were his followers and described them as volunteers fighting for an honourable cause.

"These are honest attacks against the occupation." He said, referring to the US troop presence in the country. "They ... are coming to resist the occupation, to liberate our country."

"Resistance will continue and increase day by day," he said. "Our demand is for the American occupation to get out of Iraq. We want an indepen-



MEANWHILE

'Zarqawi men to launch terror campaign in US'

NEW YORK: Supporters of Jordanian militant Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi, who have all along resented the influence of foreigners in Iraq, have threatened to launch a terror campaign in the US, a media report said. "If America continues to shield its people from the truth, we shall transport the battle to where their public cannot but see it," a supporter of Al-Zarqawi told a weekly.

Qaeda hatching plot at Afghan-Pak border

NEW YORK: High-level Al Qaeda operatives from around the world had been travelling to the outlaw Afghanistan-Pakistan border apparently to hold summits, a media report said today. For several months, a report in *Newsweek* said, the US government had been picking up reports from its spies, electronic intercepts, and "liaison services" of a Qaeda plot to strike the American homeland before the November election. "We are in the midst of Al Qaeda efforts to attack the US on a scale as big or larger than 9/11," John Brennan, chief of the Terrorist Threat Integration Centre, was quoted as saying.

Top US legislators could be targeted: FBI

NEW YORK: The FBI has warned that top US legislative officials could be targeted by Al Qaeda in Washington or on their trips around the country, a media report said. *Time* magazine quoted a top Homeland Security official as saying that Osama bin Laden may have already ordered another attack. — Agencies

dent, democratic, free country." "The Iraqi government is demanding the resistance lay

US Marines battle Shi'ite cleric Moqtada Al-Sadr's (inset) Mehdi Army in Najaf's Wadi Al Salam cemetery on Saturday. The US Army claimed it had killed 360 militiamen in four days of fighting. Reuters

and continue in the resistance are welcome and those who want can leave," Sadr said.

A Health Ministry official said 16 people had been killed in fighting in the past 24 hours in Iraq. But this did not include Najaf, where violence shut down most of the city.

Also a suicide car bomb exploded outside the house of an official in the village of Balad Ruz North of Baghdad on Monday, killing seven police and wounding 17 people, police and the US Military said. The deputy governor for Diala province Akil Hamed was among the wounded.

Allawi visited shell-scarred Najaf on Sunday and demanded militiamen loyal to Al-Sadr leave their positions around holy sites and an ancient cemetery.

On Monday, smoke rose from several places near the cemetery, the scene of close-quarter fighting in recent days, as US aircraft flew overhead.

The fighting began Thursday with the collapse of a series of truces that ended a two-month Shiite uprising in early June. Al-Sadr said he would continue fighting against the US forces and ruled out new truce talks, though his aides have repeatedly called for a new cease-fire.

Earlier on Saturday Sheikh Ahmed Shaibani had told a Najaf news conference that Sadr was ready to negotiate and agree to a truce, but had specified no timeframe for peace talks.

Iraq court issues arrest warrant against Chalabi

KHALED YACOUB OWEIS & LUKE BAKER
BAGHDAD, AUG 9

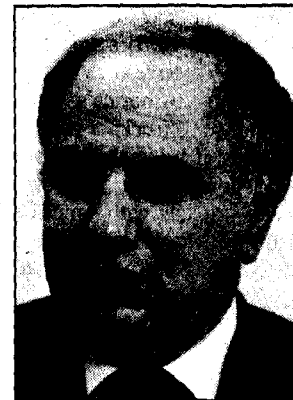
AN IRAQI judge said on Sunday he had issued an arrest warrant against leading politician and former Pentagon darling Ahmad Chalabi and his nephew Salem Chalabi, the head of the tribunal trying Saddam Hussein.

Zuhair al-Maliki, Chief Investigative Judge of the Central Criminal Court of Iraq, said an arrest warrant had been issued against Ahmad Chalabi in connection with counterfeiting money and against Salem Chalabi on a murder charge.

Ahmad Chalabi, who helped lead the US to war in Iraq, was once touted as a potential leader of the country after Saddam was ousted, but has since been spurned by Washington and many in PM Iyad Allawi's interim government. Chalabi, who fell out with Washington over accusations that he provided false information on WMDs, said he would fight the charges brought by the US-appointed judge which he said were politically motivated.

"There is no case here and I will go to meet those charges head on ...," he told CNN, speaking from Iran.

"I have been fighting Saddam for many years and we survived that and we are certainly not going to be intimidated by this judge ..."



Former Iraqi Governing Council member Ahmed Chalabi speaking to reporters in Najaf. Reuters

Officials in Washington have said Chalabi is being investigated for leaking secrets to Iran. In 1992, he was convicted in absentia of bank fraud by a military court in Jordan. He says those charges too were politically motivated.

Salem Chalabi, a lawyer, is leading the work of the Iraqi Special Tribunal which will try Saddam, the deposed President captured last year by US troops. He told CNN the charges appeared to be very strange.

"The warrant for me has to do with the fact that apparently I threatened somebody, I have no recollection of ever meeting that person, but apparently I threatened somebody who subsequently was killed ...," he said, speaking from Britain. — Reuters

Saddam trial twist in warrants for Chalabis

10/8
Baghdad, Aug. 9 (Reuters): A US-appointed Iraqi judge said yesterday he had issued an arrest warrant for leading Iraqi politician Ahmad Chalabi and his nephew, who is heading the tribunal trying former President Saddam Hussein.

Chalabi, a former darling of the Pentagon who helped lead the US into war in Iraq, said he would fight the charges against him which he described as outrageous.

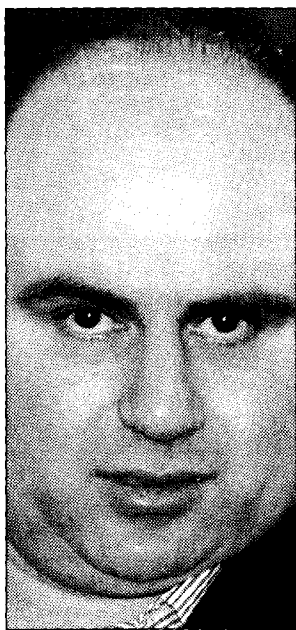
Zuhair al-Maliki, chief investigative judge of the Central Criminal Court of Iraq, said an arrest warrant had been issued against Ahmad Chalabi in connection with counterfeiting money and against Salem Chalabi for playing a role in the murder of a finance ministry official.

Ahmad Chalabi, a former head of Iraq's previous governing council, said he and his nephew had only heard of the charges through the media and that they were politically motivated.

"There is no case here and I will go to meet those charges head on," he told CNN, speaking from Tehran. "I have been fighting Saddam for many years and we survived that and we are certainly not going to be intimidated by this judge ..."

He said he had "grave reservations" about the court, but added: "Nobody is above the law and I am certainly not."

The former exile is the head of the Iraqi National Congress and was once seen as a potential Iraqi leader. But he has fallen from favour in recent months, spurned by Washington and many in the new Iraqi government.



Salem (left) and Ahmad Chalabi

Salem Chalabi, a lawyer, is leading the work of the Iraqi Special Tribunal which will try Saddam Hussein, caught last year by US troops.

He told CNN the charges appeared to be very strange.

"The one against my uncle seems very weird because it has to do with counterfeit money and I was told that when they raided his house a couple of months ago they found the equivalent of a few dollars in counterfeit money that he was given as head of the financial committee of the governing council," he said.

"The warrant for me has to do with the fact that apparently I threatened somebody, I have no recollection of ever meeting that person, but

apparently I threatened somebody who subsequently was killed ..."

He said today the murder charges against him were aimed at undermining the trial of the former dictator.

"The fact that it was leaked means there was some element of a smear campaign against me, and therefore against the tribunal, trying to discredit the tribunal, which I think has happened now," he said.

"That's what is troubling me. I want to go back and continue the work. There are a large number of staff still working, trying to do the investigations. But under these kind of allegations it makes it more difficult."

Chalabi, on a private visit

to London, said he was in contact with Iraqi officials, but was worried for his safety if he were jailed. "I plan on returning. I just want to get assurances that I will not be killed in jail or anything."

London said Iraqi authorities had not approached the government about possible extradition proceedings.

Whatever the case, the arrest warrant is likely to hand political ammunition to hard-core supporters of Saddam, who have described the special tribunal as a show trial.

The murder charges throw a bizarre twist into Saddam's trial, seen as a chance for Iraqis to put decades of torture and murder of thousands behind them. Saddam is expected to face trial on charges of crimes against humanity.

They will also complicate the task of a court faced with the painstaking challenge of proving a chain of command between Saddam and agents accused of crimes ranging from chemical attacks to torture. Iraqi commentators and lawyers said today even though Chalabi was only the administrator of the Special Iraqi Tribunal and not a judge, the arrest warrant could be damaging because he has been the public face of efforts to try Saddam.

"This will have a deep psychological and social impact on the trial. All supporters of Saddam will now ask 'how can he have a fair trial if the chief administrator of the court is charged with murder,'" said Sadoun al-Dulaimi, director of the Iraq Centre for Research and Strategic Studies.

Lawless Baghdad dusts death row

Baghdad, Aug. 8 (Reuters): Iraq's government reluctantly reinstated the death penalty for crimes including murder, kidnapping and drug running today, saying the move was a necessity and would last until stability was restored.

Minister of state Adnan al-Janabi said the measure was effective immediately, but there was confusion about whether it could be applied retroactively, casting doubt on whether Saddam Hussein could be put to death if found guilty of crimes.

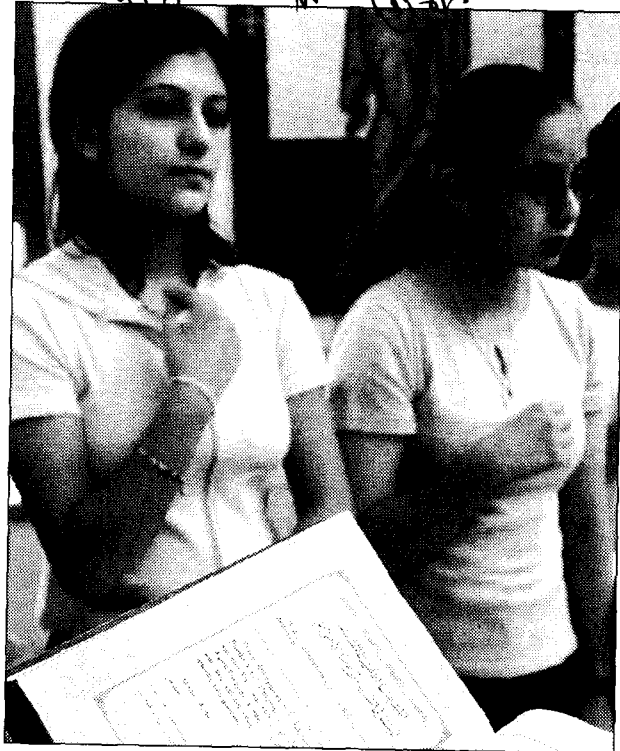
"This is the most difficult day of my life," Bakhtiar Amin, Iraq's human rights minister, said as he and Janabi unveiled the law. Amin, exiled under Saddam, has been an ardent campaigner against the death penalty for several decades.

While extremely common during Saddam's rule, capital punishment was suspended by the occupying US authorities last year. Since taking office on June 28 this year, Iraq's interim government has hinted repeatedly at reintroducing it. Janabi said the measure would not come into force until published in the official gazette, probably in the coming days.

He said the measure was being imposed with a strong degree of reluctance, but was necessary in Iraq's highly unstable situation and was something many Iraqis favoured.

"This law is to help protect the Iraqi people in the face of an onslaught of indiscriminate murder. I think it may help," he said, adding that it would remain in force until the security situation was deemed more stable.

Its introduction comes a day after the government announced an amnesty for guer-



Syrian and Iraqi girls pray at a mass in Damascus in memory of the victims of last week's church blasts in Iraq. (Reuters)

rillas who have committed minor crimes, making it part of a two-pronged approach to staunching the 16-month uprising — a hard line coupled with accommodation.

Amin emphasised that it could, like other laws, be overturned by a two-thirds majority in the National Council, a body due to be elected later this month.

Allawi ultimatum

Interim Prime Minister Iyad Allawi ordered Shia fighters to lay down their weapons and leave the holy city of Najaf today, but the militiamen fortified their positions around an ancient cemetery by laying mines.

Witnesses said clashes erupted again today in Najaf and also the squalid Baghdad district of Sadr City, as the death toll from four days of fighting in several regions mounted.

"There is no negotiation with any militia that bears arms against Iraq and the Iraqi people," a heavily guarded Allawi said in Najaf, 160 km south of Baghdad. "I believe gunmen should leave the holy sites ... quickly, lay down their weapons and return to the rule of order and law."

An aide to Sadr rejected Allawi's demand and said the cleric's Mehdi Army would never leave Najaf, Al Jazeera reported.

Iraq orders Najaf militia out

Six blasts rock Baghdad ■ Iranian diplomat held in Karbala

Reuters
Najaf, August 8

IRAQ'S INTERIM Prime Minister ordered Shia fighters to lay down their weapons and leave the holy city of Najaf on Sunday, but the militiamen fortified their positions around an ancient cemetery by laying mines.

Six explosions boomed across central Baghdad on Sunday leaving casualties. Four explosions hit the city in a row. Several minutes later two more blasts shook the city, and the crack of gunfire rang out. One of the blasts hit a bank of the Tigris River, while a second hit in downtown Baghdad, sending up billows of black smoke. An air raid siren sounded in the Green Zone, the fortified enclave housing the Iraqi government offices and the US Embassy. The cause of the explosions was not immediately clear.

Meanwhile, witnesses said clashes erupted again on Sunday in Najaf and also in the squalid Baghdad district of Sadr City, as the death toll from four days of fighting in several regions mounted. The clashes between US troops and men loyal to Shia Muslim cleric Moqtada al-Sadr have killed hundreds of people and challenged the authority of PM Ayad Allawi.

The Health Ministry said at least 43 people had been killed in Najaf and Baghdad during the 24 hours to Sunday morning.

"There is no negotiation with any militia that bears arms against Iraq and the Iraqi people," a heavily guarded Allawi told reporters in Najaf, 160 km south of Baghdad.

"I believe gunmen should leave the holy sites quickly, lay down their weapons and return to the rule of order and law."

An aide to Sadr rejected Allawi's demand and said he cleric's Mehdi Army would never leave Najaf, the holiest Shia city in Iraq, Arabic television network Al Jazeera reported.

Despite Allawi's order, fighters roamed the streets and laid mines around the crypts and mausoleums of Najaf's ancient cemetery, one of the oldest in West Asia and scene of the worst fighting. A senior JS military official in



Iraqis brandish weapons and parts from a US military OH-58 Delta helicopter which made an emergency landing on the edge of Baghdad's Sadr City neighbourhood on Sunday.

Al-Jazeera office asked to close

THE CARETAKER Iraqi government ordered pan-Arab television channel Al-Jazeera to close its offices in Baghdad for 30 days following charges it is inciting violence.

Images later broadcast by Al-Jazeera showed Iraqi police issuing the closure order although the channel vowed to continue its Iraq coverage.

Interior Minister Falah al-Naqib announced the news at a Baghdad

press conference following an order from the national security committee. Prime Minister Iyad Allawi added: "We have asked an independent committee to monitor Al-Jazeera for the last four weeks... to see what kind

The news was followed by a report on US Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld accusing Al-Jazeera and the other main Arab news channel Al-Arabiya of harming

the image of the United States in the Arab world.

Rumsfeld made the remarks at the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations, said Al-Jazeera. Al-Jazeera later issued a statement on its website expressing "regret for the unjustified move", which it argued "was contrary to pledges made by the Iraqi government to start a new era of free speech and openness".

AFP, Baghdad

Baghdad said marines had put a wide circle around the area to cut off supplies. He said the marines and Iraqi security forces numbered 5,500 men.

In Karbala, Arab television reported militants had kidnapped an Iranian diplomat, accusing him of helping cause sectarian strife in the country. Al Arabiya aired a videotape from the group calling it-

self The Islamic Army in Iraq showed a passport and business card which identified the hostage as Fereidoun Jahani, an embassy official in Karbala.

Allawi insisted on Saturday the Najaf unrest was being fomented by criminals hiding behind Sadr's name. The cleric has been the most vocal critic of the US presence in Iraq and he has many

followers among Iraq's downtrodden Shia youth.

The Health Ministry said 22 people had died in clashes in Sadr City till Sunday morning. At least 21 people were killed in similar clashes in Najaf during the same period. "The figure from Najaf is initial because there are still bodies that could not be collected due to the ongoing fighting," an official said.

Bombs kill 7 at Islamic school in Karachi

Associated Press
Karachi, August 8

TWO BOMBS ripped through a pro-Taliban Islamic school on Sunday, killing seven people including a child and injuring 14 in the latest outbreak of violence in Karachi. The blasts went off near a restaurant close to Jamia Islamia Binori Town, a Sunni Muslim school where thousands study, said Fayyaz Leghari, a senior Karachi police official. There was no claim of responsibility.

A spokesman for the seminary, Ghulam Rabhani, said there were two explosions — the first apparently intended to draw a crowd. "The first one was smaller. When people got to the site there was another explosion," he said.

The school has had problems with sectarian violence in the past. In May, assailants fatally shot the school's leader, Mufti Nizamuddin Shamzai — a prominent supporter of Afghanistan's former hard-line Taliban regime — in a drive-by attack. Thousands of his supporters rioted following his death.

Police and paramilitary troops blocked streets around the school following Sunday's attack. In recent months, Karachi has been the scene of bomb explosions and attacks targeting security forces and Westerners, including an assassination attempt on a senior general in June. The general survived, but 10 other people died.

Death penalty back in Iraq

IRAQ REINSTATED on Sunday its capital punishment law for people guilty of murder, endangering national security and distributing drugs, the government announced.

Capital punishment was suspended during the US occupation by Iraq's then-US administrator, L. Paul Bremer. But with Saddam Hussein facing trial for a wide array of human rights abuses, the interim government of PM Ayad Allawi has been promising to reinstate it. The announcement came a day after the government offered an amnesty to Iraqis who committed minor crimes since the fall of Saddam's regime.

AP, Baghdad



A blast victim being brought to a hospital in Karachi on Sunday.

Allawi declares amnesty in bid to end militancy

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BAGHDAD, Aug. 7. The Iraqi interim Iraqi Prime Minister, Ayad Allawi, on Saturday signed a long-awaited amnesty law pardoning militants who had committed minor crimes.

The amnesty had been expected to be a key element in the Government's efforts to end a 15-month-old militancy, but had been the object of controversy since it was first proposed.

Early drafts would have forgiven most people involved in militancy, but U.S. officials expressed unhappiness with the possibility that those who killed American troops could be forgiven.

The amnesty announced on Saturday did not forgive those who killed Iraqis either.

"This amnesty is not for people who have committed crimes, who have killed. Those people will be brought to justice," he said. Those eligible for

the amnesty include people in possession of light arms and explosives, those who hid intelligence about terrorist groups and people who helped those groups commit crimes, Mr. Allawi said.

Renewed fighting

Sporadic explosions and gunfire echoed through the holy Shia city of Najaf on Saturday after two days of intense clashes between U.S. forces and Shia Muslim insurgents that marked some of the bloodiest fighting in Iraq in months.

In Najaf, U.S. warplanes flew overhead and American armored vehicles and Humvees blocked the main roads into the city, but most streets appeared deserted.

In Baghdad, guerrillas fired five mortar rounds into the center of the city on Saturday, damaging two vehicles, but

causing no serious damage, the U.S. military said.

Hostage returns home

A Jordanian hostage has escaped from his Iraqi captors and returned to Jordan safely, a Jordanian Government spokeswoman said on Saturday.

Businessman Adel Obeid-Al-lah is the fifth Jordanian to come out of captivity in Iraq this week. Two other Jordanians remain captive in Iraq. "He managed to flee from captivity and return home safely to his family and friends on Thursday night," the spokeswoman said.

TV station closed

The Iraqi Government said on Saturday it had closed the Iraqi offices of *Al-Jazeera* for 30 days, accusing the pan-Arab television station of inciting violence. "They have been showing a lot of crimes and

criminals on TV, and they transfer a bad picture about Iraq and about Iraqis and encourage criminals to increase their activities," the Iraqi Interior Minister, Falah al-Naqib, said.

Video hoax

A video aired on Saturday that purportedly showed an American being decapitated in Iraq was a hoax.

The American, Benjamin Vanderford, reached by the Associated Press in San Francisco, said he videotaped the staged beheading at his friend's house using fake blood.

Mr. Vanderford (22), said he began distributing the video on the Internet months ago in hopes of drawing attention to his one-time campaign for city supervisor.

"It was part of a stunt, but no one noticed it up until now," he said. — AP

THE HINDY

8 AUG 2004

Hostage issue: Kuwaiti firm official meets Al-Dulaimi

By Atul Aneja

MANAMA, AUG. 6. The much-awaited face-to-face meeting between a representative of the Kuwaiti transport company, whose seven employees are being held hostage in Iraq, and the abductors' negotiator, Sheikh Hisham Al-Dulaimi, materialised today. This marks the culmination of a process of protracted negotiations initiated about two weeks ago. Three of the captives are Indians.

"Yes, the meeting did take place today," Rana Abu Zaineh, the spokesperson of the Kuwait and Gulf Link Transport Company (KGL) told *The Hindu* over telephone. She gave no further details, but reiterated that the talks were being "wrapped up," so that the hostage crisis could be brought to an end.

"In a very short time, we will hear the good news," she said. Ms. Rana declined to comment when asked whether the company, as in the last two days, had continued to remain in telephonic contact today with Mr. Al-Dulaimi. The KGL representative was slated to meet Mr. Al-

Dulaimi today in order to "finish the matter," Ms. Rana said.

Diplomatic sources told *The Hindu* that though the hostage drama had undergone many twists and turns, there was, once again, a distinct possibility that the hostages would be freed at the earliest.

'Homework done'

Sources said that the deal then had floundered over the question of "compensation" for the families of the people of Fallujah who had suffered due to the American bombardment of the city. But prior to today's meeting, sufficient homework had been done to ensure that talks do not derail, yet again.

Indicating that the "compensation" package had been revised, the spokesperson of KGL, had, on August 2 announced over Al-Arabyia television that the company was willing to accept "all demands" of the kidnappers. The next day a direct communication with Mr. Al-Dulaimi that had been disrupted on Sunday night was restored. Mr. Al-Dulaimi has apparently also accepted KGL's demands that he

would not walk out of the future negotiations.

Having completed all preparations, KGL's representative headed for Iraq to conclude the deal. "After the breakdown of talks last Sunday, another cycle of negotiations has been completed today," the sources said.

Despite optimism, the sources cautioned that it was necessary to keep the fingers crossed.

Meanwhile, in New Delhi, the Minister of State for External Affairs, E. Ahamed, cancelled his four-nation tour of Singapore, Malaysia, Samoa and Brunei in order to attend to the hostage crisis.

UNI reports from New Delhi:

Mr. Al-Dulaimi has urged Amitabh Bachchan and other Bollywood actors to appeal to the kidnappers of the three Indians for their release.

"... if Amitabh Bachchan and Dharmendra go on TV and request not only me but the kidnappers and other Iraqis to resolve the crisis, then they (hostages) could be released," he said in an interview to the *Outlook* magazine.

THE HINDU

7 AUG 2004

FIGHTING ERUPTS ACROSS SHI'ITE AREAS

300 militia killed in Najaf clashes

Associated Press

BAGHDAD, Aug. 6. — Coalition forces battled militiamen loyal to radical Shi'ite cleric Muqtada al-Sadr in several Iraqi cities today, saying they killed about 300 militants in Najaf over two days of fighting. Battles in other Shiite areas killed dozens more, according to Iraqi authorities.

The death toll among the anti-coalition fighters was among the largest in a single continuing engagement since the end of the war. The fighting began in the holy city of Najaf yesterday and has since spread to other Shi'ite areas across Iraq.

US helicopter gunships pounded militants today hiding in Najaf's cemetery, while Italian soldiers battled with militants who attacked their positions and a police station in the southern city of Nasiriyah. Members of al-Sadr's Mahdi Army militia seized four police stations in Amarah, witnesses said.

"We estimate we've killed 300 anti-Iraqi forces in the past two days of fighting," said Capt. Carrie Batson, a Marine spokeswoman. A total of three US troops were killed and 12 wounded in the fighting in Najaf, she said.

Najaf's Governor, Mr Adnan al-Zurufi, put the toll even higher, saying 400 members of Sadr's militia were

Al-Sistani indisposed

LONDON, Aug. 6. — Iraq's top Shi'ite cleric, Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, today arrived in Britain, where he is expected to receive treatment for a heart condition.

Al-Sistani arrived around 1.40 p.m. at Heathrow, Mr Jaffar Bassam, a spokesman for the Imam Ali foundation, Al-Sistani's liaison office here, said. Al-Sistani carries great political weight in Iraq as he is the top religious figure among the country's Shi'ite majority. — AP



Grand Ayatollah
Ali al-Sistani

killed and more than 1,000 arrested.

Al-Sadr blamed the USA for all the violence in Iraq in a sermon read on his behalf today in the Kufa Mosque close to Najaf. The interim government had called America "our partner", he said. Meanwhile, the government said it would not tolerate independent militias, including the Mahdi Army.

Lebanese abducted: Four Lebanese truck drivers went missing in Iraq today on the road west from Baghdad past the Sunni Muslim insurgent strongholds of Fallujah and Ramadi, AFP adds from Beirut.

One charged for Iraq abuse

Associated Press
Copenhagen, August 5

A DANISH army officer was charged on Thursday with four counts of negligence for allegedly denying food and water to detainees in Iraq, forcing them to sit in "painful positions" and verbally humiliating them.

The charges against Capt. Annemette Hommel, 37, stem from alleged incidents between March and June during her tour of duty at a Danish military camp in southern Iraq. Hommel, an intelligence officer, and Col. Henrik Flach, the head of Denmark's 496-soldier deployment in Iraq, were ordered home this week because of the allegations.

The accusations were first reported on Monday by the Ekstra Badet newspaper and confirmed by the government.

Military prosecutor Peter Otken said detainees

Three Britons allege atrocities

Three Britons freed from Guantanamo Bay claim they suffered systematic brutality and were kept in cages in the sweltering Cuban heat during their detention at the US military base. In a report released by their lawyers on Wednesday, the men say the brutal treatment forced them to make false confessions.

"The idea that these three people were kept in this prison, this gulag and forced to make false confessions is amazing", Michael Ratner, head of the Center for Constitutional Rights, said at a news conference at the group's Manhattan offices. Maj. Michael Shavers, a Pentagon spokesman, said US policy condemns abuse of detainees. He declined to address specific allegations of abuse or say whether any had been, or would be, investigated. Navy Secretary Gordon England said he doubted the allegations, telling CNN, "I don't believe they're true".

AP, New York

being questioned by Hommel were "forced to sit in stressing and, eventually, painful positions and maintained with force to stay in these positions". The detainees also were verbally humiliated and

denied food and water.

Military prosecutors said they found four separate instances of Hommel mistreating detainees. But Otken said the abuse was not physical. "There are no suspicions they were beat-

en or kicked", Otken said. Hommel said the charges against her were false. "I've absolutely not done any of this", she said. "This is an untrue claim".

Hommel said tensions with the camp's Palestinian civilian translators were to blame. Interviewing Iraqi insurgents "has not been a chat session", she said. "These were serious conversations about serious issues". Hommel admitted denying water to a detainee and forcing him to sit on the floor during a one-hour interview, but she said her actions were well within the confines of the Geneva Conventions protecting prisoners of war. "I don't feel my personal integrity has let me down. I've respected all the existing rules", she said.

Denmark's soldiers serve in Basra and nearby Qurnah, 250 miles southeast of Baghdad, and are under British command.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

6 AUG 2002

Six more hostages released in Iraq

'The kidnappers had asked for ransom'

Reuters
Baghdad, August 4 *HR-13*

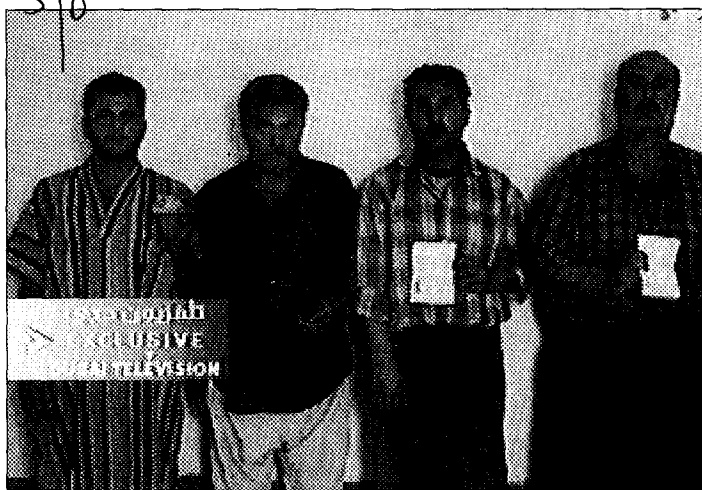
ARMED IRAQIS led by a tribal sheik raided a house in the rebellious city of Fallujah and freed four Jordanian hostages without a shot being fired, one of the freed hostages said on Wednesday.

And separately, al-Jazeera television reported that a militant group linked to al-Qaida ally Abu Musab al-Zarqawi had released two Turkish drivers it was holding hostage because their companies had agreed to stop working in Iraq.

A group calling itself the Death Squad of Iraqi Resistance said last Thursday it was holding the Jordanian truck drivers to put pressure on their transport company to stop cooperation with American forces in Iraq. It also urged Arabs to pressure governments to end support for the US-led forces.

But one of the released Jordanians, Ahmad Hassan Abu Jaafar, said the gunmen who kidnapped him and three other drivers outside Fallujah nine days ago had been motivated by money. "When the brave people of Fallujah knew that we were held hostage they raided the house and rescued us last night. We are all safe," Jaafar said. "No one fired a single shot." "They kidnapped us for money, to put pressure on others to pay them money for our release, but the people saved us and no money was paid," he said.

Maher Sinoqrut, brother of freed hostage Ahmad Sinoqrut,



A TV grab of the four Jordanian hostages before their release. AFP

12 civilians killed in Mosul gunfire

IRAQI POLICE and insurgents exchanged rifle and rocket-propelled grenade fire on the streets of Mosul on Wednesday and at least 12 civilians were killed, police and hospital officials said. "The police are shooting everywhere and there are RPGs being fired back," said a correspondent in the ci-

ty. "The fighting seems to be going on around a highway bridge and is very fierce. There have been five or six loud explosions." Other battles raged to the north, in the centre and to the south of the city, he said. Local television said a curfew had been imposed in the city.

Reuters, Mosul

26, credited tribal leaders and local elders, who were asked by Jordan to act as mediators, for securing their release.

In the case of the Turkish drivers, a videotaped statement

broadcast on al-Jazeera said: "Due to the Turkish firms' decision to stop sending supplies to US forces, the Tawhid and Jihad Group has decided to free the two hostages."

Confusion hits hostage crisis

Kenya Announces Release; India Douses Euphoria With Denial

Our Political Bureau
NEW DELHI 1 AUGUST

INDIA on Sunday said it did not have any confirmation that the three Indians kidnapped along with four other nationals in Iraq had been set free, as announced by the Kenyan government this evening. "I wish to convey that as of now, we have no confirmation of their release. Neither our embassy in Baghdad nor our embassy in Kuwait have been able to confirm this," minister of state for external affairs E Ahamed told reporters here soon after being confronted about the reports from Nairobi.

KGL, the Kuwaiti company employing the seven truck drivers held hostage also asserted on Sunday night that they have not been released. A spokesperson for the company said the Kenyan foreign minister Chirau Ali Mwakwere, who made the first announcement about the hostages being freed, had "misunderstood" the issue.

Antaryami, Tilak Raj and Sukhdeo Singh were abducted along with three Kenyans and one Egyptian, all truck drivers working for the Kuwait Gulf Link (KGL), by a relatively unknown terrorist group Islamic Secret Army — Holders of Black Banners on July 21. The Kenyan foreign minister had told reporters in Nairobi on Sunday evening that the seven hostages had been set free. "They are in safe hands now," he was quoted by news

Dulaimi opts out

Efforts to secure the release of seven hostages, including three Indians, in Iraq suffered a setback on Sunday with key Iraqi negotiator pulling out of the parleys amid conflicting reports on their re-



lease. Negotiator Sheikh Hisham Al-Dulaimi was quoted by AP in Baghdad as saying "I am withdrawing because I have reached no agreement with the Kuwaitis (the employer of the kidnapped truck drivers)...I don't know what is going to happen." The Kuwaiti employer of the hostages Kuwait and Gulf Link Transport Company (KGL) said Dulaimi has withdrawn from the talks but efforts were on to persuade him to remain engaged with the abductors.

—PTI

agency AFP. A Kenyan government spokesperson later added that the hostages had been taken to the Egyptian embassy in Baghdad. Confusion over the veracity of the reports, however, cropped up with the Iraqi tribal negotiator, Sheikh Hisham Dulaimi expressing ignorance about the release of the hostages.

"I know nothing about it. This is all news to me," he told AFP. "So far there have been no positive results. The Kuwaiti company is not responding to us. They have agreed to pull out of Iraq but they are still arguing about the compensation," he added, referring to the kidnappers' demands. There, however, had been ample hints throughout the day to indicate that the negotiators were on the verge of a breakthrough. The first indication came from Rana Abu Zaineh, the spokesperson of the Kuwaiti company employing the seven truck drivers. "The negotiations are in the last stage and are wrapping now...What we are negotiating is how and where we are going to receive them," she told PTI.

The government here, however, continued to approach the crisis cautiously and avoid any hints of early enthusiasm, even though it was in constant touch with the negotiators indirectly, through the KGL mediator. After two rounds of meetings of the crisis management group, the government merely taken note of the fact that the kidnappers had extended the deadline by another 24 hours.

Two Pak hostages killed in Iraq

Islamabad Asks Its Nationals To Pull Out

Baghdad: A militant group holding two Pakistani contractors hostage killed the men, but freed their Iraqi driver, according to the pan-Arab television station al-Jazeera.

The group, calling itself the Islamic Army in Iraq, announced in a video Monday that it had kidnapped two Pakistanis working for US forces and sentenced them to death because their country was discussing sending troops to Iraq.

In a new videotape sent to al-Jazeera on Wednesday, the men said they had carried out their threat, the station reported. It said that the video showed the corpses of the two men, but declined to show the footage. The kidnapped men were identified

by Pakistan as engineer Raja Azad, 49, and driver Sajad Naeem, 29, both hailing from Pakistan-occupied Kashmir and working for the Kuwait-based al-Tamimi group in Baghdad.

Pakistan on Thursday condemned the execution as "a crime against humanity and Islam" and advised its citizens working in the war-ravaged country to pull out. It also asked its nationals planning to visit Iraq for pilgrimage to holy places like Karbala to defer their plans in the light of the killing.

"President Pervez Musharraf and Prime Minister Chaudhry Shujaat Hussain have received the news of the reported murder with distress and anguish," state-owned Pakistan television reported.

Speaking in the national assembly, foreign minister Khurshid Mehmood Kasuri said that

despite informing captors that Pakistan has not taken any decision to send its troops to Iraq, they killed its workers. The national assembly also adopted a unanimous resolution denouncing the Islamic Army of Iraq.

Meanwhile, the family of one of two slain workers blamed President Musharraf on Thursday, saying he could have saved their lives by ruling out sending troops to Iraq.

"This tragedy could've been averted if Pakistan government had categorically said it would not send troops to Iraq," said a grieving Abdul Razaq, brother-in-law of Azad Hussein Khan who was reportedly killed after five days in captivity. Razaq pleaded with the government to send a strong signal that it would not send troops to Iraq, to save lives of other poor Pakistani workers still in the violence-strewn country. AFP



A file photo shows Kausar Perveen (right), wife of Pakistani hostage Azad, crying as her children show a picture of her husband in Islamabad

নতুন সরকার ক্ষমতায় আসার এক মাসের মাথায় হিংসায় উত্তাল ইরাক

বিস্ফোরণ, সংঘর্ষে হত শতাধিক

বাগদাদ, ২৮ জুলাই: ইরাকে ক্ষমতা হস্তান্তরের ঠিক এক মাসের মাথায় দেশ জুড়ে আজ হিংসার বলি হলেন শতাধিক মানুষ। বাগদাদের উত্তরে বাকুবা শহরের একটি জনবহুল বাজারে বিস্ফোরক বোমাই মিনিবাসে বিস্ফোরণে অন্তত ৭০ জন প্রাণ হারিয়েছেন, আহত হয়েছেন ৫৬ জনেরও বেশি। আজ সকালেই বাগদাদের দক্ষিণে ব্যাবিলনের কাছে ইরাকি পুলিশ ও গেরিলাদের মধ্যে গুলির লড়াইয়ে মারা গিয়েছেন ৩৫ জন গেরিলা ও ৭ জন পুলিশ। বাগদাদের রাস্তায় গেরিলাদের ছোড়া রকেটে মারা গিয়েছেন এক ইরাকি। উত্তরপশ্চিমাংশে গাড়িবোমা বিস্ফোরণে নিহত হন এক মার্কিন সেনা, আহত এক ইরাকি-সহ আরও তিন সেনা। পশ্চিম ইরাক জুড়েও চলছে হিংসা। এক জঙ্গি ও দু'জন বিদেশি সেনা নিহত, তাদের পরিচয় জানা যায়নি। টেনে নামানো হয়েছে দু'টি বিমান। গত অগস্টে নজাফের মসজিদের সামনে বিস্ফোরণে ৮০ জন মারা যাওয়ার পর ইরাকে একটি বিস্ফোরণে এত জনের প্রাণ হারানোর ঘটনা এই প্রথম। ক্ষমতা হস্তান্তরের এক মাস পূর্তিকে মাথায় রেখেই একযোগে হামলাগুলি চালানো হয়েছে কি না, তা এখনও নিশ্চিত নয়।

স্থানীয় সময় সকাল দশটা নাগাদ বাকুবুর ওই বিস্ফোরণ ঘটে। হতাহতের সংখ্যা আরও বাড়তে পারে বলে আশঙ্কা। বিস্ফোরণে বাকুবুর বাজার সংলগ্ন ছ'টি বাড়ি ধ্বংস হয়ে গিয়েছে। কাছেই আল নাজদা থানার সামনে ইরাকি পুলিশের নিয়োগ কেন্দ্রে ভর্তির জন্য দাঁড়িয়েছিলেন বহু ইরাকি যুবক। আজ স্থানীয় সময় দশটা নাগাদ বাসটি দ্রুত গতিতে এসে সরাসরি ধাক্কা মারে নিয়োগ কেন্দ্রের সামনে ভিড়ের উপর। সঙ্গে সঙ্গে ভয়াবহ বিস্ফোরণে কেঁপে ওঠে এলাকা। ঘাতক বাসটির পাশেই আর একটি মিনিবাসের ২১ জন যাত্রীও এই ঘটনায় মারা যান।

গত মাসে ক্ষমতা হস্তান্তরের আগেই ২৪ জুন দেশ জুড়ে একের পর এক বিস্ফোরণে প্রায় হারান ৮৯ জন। ইরাকি রাজনীতিক মহলের ধারণা দেশে যখনই স্থিতিবস্থা ফেরানোর চেষ্টা করা হয়েছে তখনই বড় ধরনের হামলা চালিয়ে



বিস্ফোরণে ছিন্নভিন্ন মৃতদেহ ছড়িয়ে আছে এদিক-ওদিক। তার পাশ দিয়ে ইরাকি পুলিশের সতর্ক পদক্ষেপ। বুধবার বাকুবায়। — এ এফ পি

আতঙ্কের পরিবেশ সৃষ্টি করেছে জঙ্গিরা। কোনও জঙ্গি সংগঠন এখনও আজকের বিস্ফোরণের দায় স্বীকার না করলেও জর্ডনের সন্দেহভাজন আল কায়দা জঙ্গি আবু মুসাব আল জারকোয়াইয়ের সংগঠনের এর পিছনে হাত থাকতে পারে বলে মনে করছেন বিশেষজ্ঞেরা। জারকোয়াইয়ের অনুগামী গেরিলারা এর আগেও ইরাকে বহু ভয়াবহ গাড়িবোমা বিস্ফোরণ ঘটিয়েছে। এ বছর ২ মার্চ কারবালার শিয়া তীর্থস্থানগুলিতে ও বাগদাদে একাধিক বিস্ফোরণে মারা গিয়েছিলেন ১৮১ জন।

আজ বিস্ফোরণের বেশ কিছু ক্ষণ পরেও দমকল কর্মীদের হোসপাইপের জল দিয়ে জ্বলন্ত মৃতদেহগুলির আগুন নেভাতে দেখা যায়। ঘটনাস্থলের চারপাশে ছড়িয়ে ছিটিয়ে থাকা পোড়া গাড়ি, ভাঙা কাচ,

ছিন্নভিন্ন মৃতদেহের অংশ ও রক্তের স্রোতের মধ্যেই নিহতদের আত্মীয়েরা খুঁজে নিচ্ছেন প্রিয়জনের দেহাংশ। বিস্ফোরণের পর পুলিশ ও সেনাবাহিনী গোটা এলাকা ঘিরে ফেলে ট্রাকে চাপিয়ে সরিয়ে নেয় মৃতদেহগুলি। আহতদের নিয়ে যাওয়া হয় স্থানীয় হাসপাতালে। ইরাকের উপ-বিদেশমন্ত্রী লাবিদ আব্বাউয়ি বলেছেন, “উন্মাদদের সঙ্গে লড়াই করছি আমরা। ইরাকিদের চরম ক্ষতির জন্য সব কিছু করতে পারে এরা।”

বাকুবায় যখন নিরীহ সাধারণ মানুষ জঙ্গিদের হিংসার শিকার, তখন আজ সকালে বাগদাদের দক্ষিণে ব্যাবিলনের কাছে আস সুয়াইরায় আন্তর্জাতিক সেনাবাহিনী ও ইরাকি পুলিশের সঙ্গে গেরিলাদের তুমুল সংঘর্ষ হয়। ইরাকি সেনা এবং ইউক্রেনীয়, পোলিশ ও মার্কিন সেনার

যৌথ বাহিনীর সঙ্গে গেরিলাদের ওই সংঘর্ষে ৩৫ জন গেরিলা প্রাণ হারিয়েছে, গ্রেফতার হয়েছে ৪০ জন। সংঘর্ষে ৭ ইরাকি সেনা মারা গেলেও বিদেশি জোটসেনাদের কেউ হতাহত হয়নি।

তিন দিন পরেই বাগদাদে একটি জাতীয় সম্মেলনে সারা দেশের প্রায় ১০০০ প্রতিনিধির আসার কথা। ওই সম্মেলনেই স্থির হবে ইরাকের ভবিষ্যৎ। ইরাকের জাতীয় কাউন্সিলের জন্য ১০০ জন জনপ্রতিনিধিও নির্বাচিত হবেন। ইরাকে গণতন্ত্র ফেরানো ও জানুয়ারির ভোটের আগে সম্মেলনটি অত্যন্ত গুরুত্বপূর্ণ। তার আগে গেরিলাদের এই আত্মঘাতী হামলা ইরাকের নিরাপত্তা নিয়ে চিন্তা আরও বাড়িয়ে তুলেছে।

ইরাকে জোট সেনার আক্রমণ শুরুর পর থেকেই এক শ্রেণির ইরাকিকে আক্রমণ

লক্ষ্য করে চলেছে জঙ্গিরা। পেশার খাতিরে কিংবা সাদামের কঠোর শাসন থেকে বেরিয়ে আসার তাগিদে যে ইরাকিরা মার্কিনদের সাহায্য করেছে, তাদের খুন করা গেরিলাদের একটি প্রধান উদ্দেশ্য। মার্কিন নিয়ন্ত্রণে যে ইরাকি সেনা ও পুলিশ বাহিনী তৈরি হয়েছে তাদের উপরেও অসংখ্য হামলা চালিয়েছে গেরিলারা। আজও আক্রমণের প্রধান লক্ষ্য পুলিশ নিয়োগ কেন্দ্রের সামনে ভিড় করা ইরাকি যুবকরাই ছিল বলে মনে করা হচ্ছে।

ইরাকে যুদ্ধ শুরুর পর থেকে এ পর্যন্ত ৯০৫ জন মার্কিন সেনা মারা গিয়েছেন। আর শুধু ক্ষমতা হস্তান্তরের পর এই এক মাসে নিহত হয়েছেন প্রায় এক হাজার ইরাকি নাগরিক ও নিরাপত্তা-কর্মী। আজ এই পরিসংখ্যান পেশ করেন এক উচ্চপদস্থ মার্কিন কমান্ডার। — রয়টার্স

68 killed in car bomb attack in Iraq

in Abu
19/07/01

By Atul Aneja ⁴⁰⁻¹ ^{29/}

MANAMA, JULY 28. At least 68 people were killed and 56 injured today in a car bomb explosion next to a police station in Baquba, a town south of the Iraqi capital, Baghdad. Eyewitnesses said a suicide bomber drove his car into a line of men who had queued up for recruitment in the Iraqi police force, exactly a month after an interim Government backed by the United States assumed office.

The police station was situated in a crowded market area.

Iraqi guerrillas view policemen and aspirants for the security forces as legitimate targets because they are seen as supporters of the U.S. occupation.

The dead included 21 people travelling in a minibus, which the car bomber overtook before detonating the explosives.

The blast was so intense that it shattered glass in nearby cafes, pulled out facades off buildings and set other vehicles aflame.

People were seen dousing flames with hoses at the explosion site.

Bodies on fire

Many bodies were also on fire, surrounded by debris resulting

from the blast. Police used pick-up trucks to take the dead and wounded to hospital.

Officials said the police station was not damaged in the strike, but the casualty rate was high because a large number of recruits had spilled out of its premises into the streets outside. The station had been a target of a suicide bombing three months ago, and it was well protected with thick blast walls.

Al-Jazeera television quoted police officials as saying that Ansar al-Islam and other Al-Qaeda linked organisations might have carried out the attack. An organisation, which is called Ansar al-Sunna, had taken responsibility for a strike in Baquba on July 6, in which nine persons had been killed and 37 wounded.

Analysts say that after consolidating in Fallujah and Ramadi near Baghdad, the resistance was now seeking to tighten its grip in Baquba, as well as the cities of Samaara and Tirkat, north of the capital.

Day of violence

In a day that witnessed a marked spurt in violence, officers with the U.S.-led occupation forces said that seven Iraqi soldiers were killed and 10 wounded during clashes near the town of Suwariya, south of Baghdad. A Polish military spokesman said 35 guerrillas were also killed and 40 captured.

In the northern city of Kirkuk, an Iraqi policeman was shot dead on Wednesday morning. One person was killed in a rocket explosion on a busy road in Baghdad today.

On Tuesday night, one U.S. soldier was killed and three wounded when a roadside bomb exploded in Balad Ruz, north of Baghdad.

Photograph on Page 15

Iran 'can create' N-bomb

The Times, London

28/7
The Times, London.

LONDON, July 27. — Iran is just "months away" from having the capability to enrich uranium for a nuclear bomb, Western diplomatic sources said yesterday.

Through diplomatic manoeuvring, Teheran had bought time to complete its research on constructing a centrifuge system to produce highly enriched uranium, the sources told

The Iranians had clearly chosen that track for developing bomb-grade material over creating plutonium from its nuclear reactor facility at Bushehr, they said. "Iran appears to be further advanced in acquiring the relevant nuclear technology than we had initially thought," said one British official.

Britain, France and Germany, the three European countries that have sought to defuse the

Iranian nuclear threat
Iranian nuclear threat through negotiation, are now seeking an urgent meeting with the regime in Teheran. The situation was "grave", said an official.

Teheran has given the impression of conceding to diplomatic pressure by accepting tougher verification controls by the IAEA. "But actually they have just continued with the research work and now they are only a few months away from completing the programme," one source said.

the family card

THE STATESMAN

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Ebadi vows to pursue scribe death probe

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26/7*

Tehran, July 25 (Reuters): Iranian Nobel Peace Prize winner Shirin Ebadi today vowed not to rest until the killer of Canadian-Iranian journalist Zahra Kazemi was identified, after Iran's judiciary acquitted the sole defendant in the case.

"I will pursue this case until my last breath," said human rights lawyer Ebadi, who is representing the family of Kazemi, who lived in Canada and died on an assignment in Iran.

Kazemi's death in detention last July after being arrested for taking photographs of Tehran's Evin prison has severely strained Iran's ties with Canada — which withdrew its ambassador this month — and thrown an international spotlight on human rights abuses and judicial process in Iran.

Iran's reform-minded government, human rights groups and lawyers for the Kazemi family had long said the intelligence agent charged with killing her was a scapegoat and accused the powerful and conservative judiciary of covering up evidence pointing to the involvement of judiciary officials in her death.

"The Iranian government from the beginning believed the man on trial was innocent and the court came to the same conclusion," said foreign ministry spokesperson Hamid Reza Asefi.

Ebadi, speaking to reporters outside the Tehran court which yesterday cleared intelligence ministry agent Mohammad Reza



Shirin Ebadi outside the court in Tehran on Sunday. (Reuters)

Aqdam of Kazemi's killing, said key testimony had been ignored.

"We introduced some witnesses and called on the court to summon them and to listen to their comments but none of them were taken into consideration," she said. "I'm sorry, because if they had been heeded those who committed this crime ... would have been identified."

Iran's judiciary, which abruptly brought Aqdam's trial to an end last Sunday after just three court hearings, appeared to be moving quickly to wrap up the case.

Announcing its decision to acquit Aqdam of "semi-intentional murder" due to lack of evidence, it also said "blood money" would be paid to Kazemi's family from the state treas-

ury. Blood money compensation is normally paid to the victim's family by those convicted of their murder. When no guilty person is identified the money is paid by the state.

But Ebadi said she would lodge an appeal for the case to be reopened at a higher court. She has threatened to take the case to an international court if her efforts are blocked in Iran.

Paris-based media rights group Reporters Without Borders also called for a fresh trial.

"This trial has been a masquerade," said Robert Menard, a spokesperson for the group. "What cannot happen is that the trial process ends following this acquittal."

Kazemi, 54, underwent three days of interrogations inside Evin prison before being sent to a military hospital where she slipped into a coma and died.

Iran's judiciary initially announced she had died naturally of a stroke. But a subsequent government report showed Kazemi had received a blow to the head while in detention that split her skull and caused a brain haemorrhage. In tearful testimony to the court, Kazemi's mother said her daughter's fingers, nose and toes were broken and there were burn marks on her chest.

She said Iranian officials forced her to agree to bury the body in Iran, instead of sending it to Canada where authorities wanted to carry out a further autopsy.

Egypt envoy seizure raises Iraq stakes

Baghdad, July 24 (Reuters): Iraq and Egypt tried to secure the release of a senior Egyptian diplomat today after he was snatched in a brazen kidnapping while leaving a mosque — the first envoy to be taken hostage in a growing wave of abductions.

Interim Prime Minister Iyad Allawi urged Cairo not to pander to the kidnappers, who seized Egyptian diplomat Mohamed Mamdouh Qutb yesterday afternoon in Baghdad after reports Cairo might consider helping Iraq with security. Qutb is the number three in Egypt's mission in Baghdad.

"We are involved in intense talks to try to secure his release," a source at the Egyptian embassy said. "We were so shocked. He's a very decent and religious man."

The kidnapping of a well-pro-

tected diplomat outside a busy place of worship is a step up in sophistication for militants and sharply raises the stakes in Iraq's weeks-long series of abductions, which have mostly involved foreign truck drivers.

Today, the chief of Iraq's al-Mansour Construction Company, a state-owned firm, was kidnapped as he drove to work in Baghdad. Raad Adnan Mahmud was also director-general of Iraq's housing and construction ministry.

Mahmoud's kidnappers have not made any demands so far.

In another hostage standoff, a group which has threatened to behead seven foreign truck drivers issued a new 48-hour deadline to the Kuwaiti company that employs them, demanding Iraqi prisoners be freed from Kuwaiti and US jails — a demand that is

impossible for the company to meet.

Al Jazeera TV yesterday broadcast pictures of Egyptian diplomat Qutb sitting in front of six hooded and armed men from a group calling itself the "Lions of God Battalions in Iraq."

The group said the abduction was in response to Egyptian comments that Cairo was ready to offer its security expertise to the Iraqi government, the Arabic satellite station said.

Allawi visited Cairo this week and discussed the possibility of using Egyptian troops in training Iraq's forces. But Egyptian officials were quick to emphasise that no deal was struck.

Qutb's abduction came four days after he was widely photographed celebrating the release of an Egyptian truck driver kidnapped by insurgents ear-

lier this month. The driver was freed after his Saudi Arabian employer promised to pull out of Iraq.

Italy, Australia threat

A group claiming to be the European wing of al Qaeda today threatened Australia and Italy with attacks if they did not pull troops out of Iraq.

The statement signed by the Islamic Tawhid Group, The al Qaeda organisation, Europe, and posted on a website said it would attack both countries with "columns of rigged cars" if their demands were not met.

"Australian people, if your government refuses to withdraw and respond to us we will shake the ground beneath your feet as we did in Indonesia and columns of rigged cars will not stop," it said.



A picture taken from Al Jazeera shows masked gunmen standing behind the Egyptian diplomat Mohamed Mamdouh Qutb at an undisclosed location in Iraq. (Reuters)

INDIANS HOSTAGE IN IRAQ

MILITANTS' DEMAND: DELHI MUST WITHDRAW CITIZENS

Agencies
Baghdad, July 21

IRAQI GUERRILLAS took three Indians, two Kenyans and an Egyptian hostage today and threatened to behead them one by one unless the Kuwaiti company they worked for pulled out of Iraq and their countries recalled all their citizens.

The abduction of the six employees of a truck company sparked a new crisis after Filipino hostage Angelo de la Cruz was freed and returned to Manila to be reunited with his family.

Ironically, neither India nor Kenya nor Egypt has any troops in Iraq. Nor was any of them part of the original 160,000-member coalition force.

In photos sent to AP, six of the hostages were shown standing behind three masked gunmen. One of the hostages was holding a piece of paper with typed names of seven men — presumably only six of them were taken hostage — their nationalities, passport numbers and the registration numbers of their trucks. The paper is stamped July 20, with the words 'Universal Services' handwritten on top. It was not clear which of the Kenyans listed on the paper was not among the hostages.

The names of the Indians read An-taryami, Tilak Raj and Sukhdev Singh. The others on the list are Ibrahim Khamis, Salim Faiz Khamis and Jalal

Awadh (from Kenya) and Mohammed Ali Sanad (Egypt).

"We announce we have captured two Kenyans, three Indians and one Egyptian. We tell the company to withdraw and close its offices in Iraq," said one of the masked men, from a group calling itself the 'Black Banners'.

In a press statement, the group said it "would behead one of them every 72 hours if their nations didn't pull out of Iraq and the company they work for didn't close its branch here. The deadline starts from 8 pm tonight".

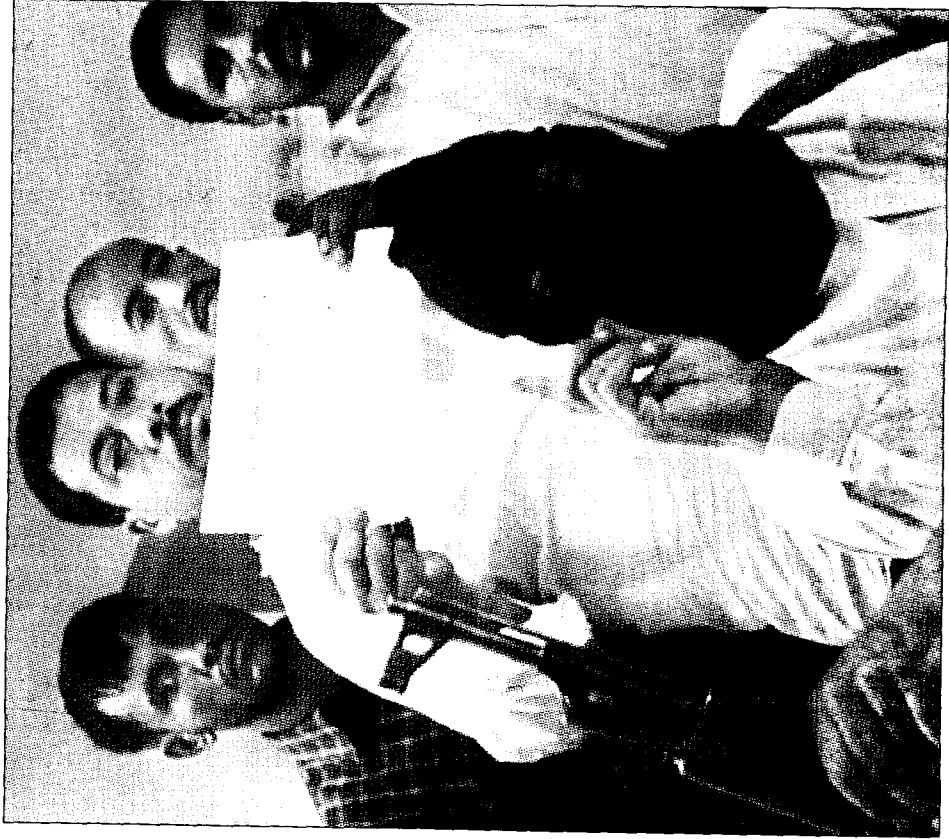
"We have warned all countries, companies, businessmen and truck drivers that those who deal with American cowboy occupiers will be targeted by the fires of the Mujahideen," the statement said. "Here you are once again transporting goods, weapons and military equipment that backs the US army."

More than 60 foreigners have been taken hostage in Iraq in recent months.

In a broadcast on al-Arabiya TV, the Egyptian hostage appealed to his company to withdraw its employees from Iraq. "They will chop our heads off," he said. "Who will feed my family, my brothers and sisters? I urge the company to send us back to our countries." The guerrillas warned that every Kuwaiti company dealing with Americans "will be dealt with as an American".

'They will chop our heads off. Who will feed my family?'

A hostage



Militants guard the hostages at an undisclosed location in Iraq on Wednesday. AP

Iraq radicals threaten to behead 3 Indian hostages

BAGHDAD, July 21. — A militant group said today it had taken hostage three Indians, two Kenyans and an Egyptian and would behead them if their countries did not announce their intention to withdraw their citizens and troops from Iraq immediately. None of these countries were part of the 160,000-member coalition force in Iraq.

Interim Prime Minister Mr

Iyad Allawi had last week appealed to India and Egypt to join the coalition.

As the news reached Delhi, the government sprung into action to try and secure the release of Antaryami, Tilak Raj and Sukdev Singh. All three are believed to be truckers employed by a Kuwaiti firm, Universal Services.

Minister of state for external affairs Mr E Ahmed said: "We

will do whatever possible to get our people back. We will go to any extent to resolve the issue."

Foreign minister Mr Natwar Singh, now in Pakistan, has been briefed about the incident.

The radical group, calling itself "The Holders of the Black Banners", said in a statement that they had taken the truckers hostage and would behead one of them every 72

hours if their nations did not pull out of Iraq and the Kuwaiti firm they work for did not close its branch here. The count-down began at 8 p.m. (local time) on Wednesday.

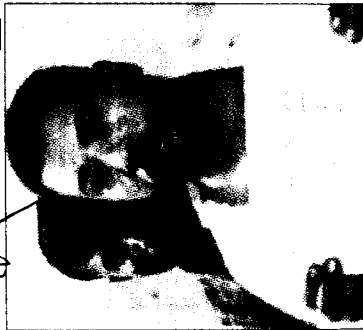
"We have warned all the countries, companies, businessmen and truck drivers that those who deal with American cowboy occupiers will be targeted by the fires of the Mujahideen," the statement

said. "Here, you are once again transporting, goods, weapons and military equipment that backs the US army."

The statement comes a day after militants released Filipino hostage Angelo dela Cruz after his country gave in to their demand and pulled its 51-member force out of Iraq.

In photographs provided along with the statement, the hostages were shown standing

behind three seated, masked gunmen. One of the hostages could be seen holding a paper with the typed names of seven men — six of them presumably the hostages — their nationalities, passport numbers and the registration numbers of the trucks they were driving (see **photograph on left**). The paper is stamped 20 July with the words "Universal Services" handwritten on top. — AP



THE STATESMAN

22 JUL 2001

IRAQI REBELS WARN COALITION MEMBERS TO FOLLOW MANILA'S EXAMPLE

Militants train guns on America's allies

Associated Press
Baghdad, July 21

NEW ONLINE statements by purported militants threatened attacks against three US allies — Poland, Japan and Bulgaria — if they don't pull their troops from Iraq, a day after a Filipino hostage was released because the Philippines bowed to insurgents' demands and withdrew its tiny contingent.

Meanwhile, the death toll of US forces in Iraq since the start of the war in rose to 900 early on Wednesday, when a roadside bomb exploded north of Baghdad, killing one US 1st Infantry Division soldier.

Maj Neal O'Brien of the 1st Infantry Division said the most recent soldier killed was on patrol in a Bradley fighting vehicle in Duluiyah when the bomb detonated shortly after midnight Wednesday.

On Tuesday, the military said that two US Marines and two US soldiers were killed in action in Anbar Province, a Sunni-dominated area west of Baghdad.

The Marines were killed in separate incidents while conducting "security operations;" one soldier was killed Monday, and a second died Monday of wounds.

A count put the number of American soldiers killed since the war began at 900. Counts of the number of US service members killed in Iraq vary, with some already exceeding the 900 figure. The Pentagon's latest casualty update, released on Tuesday, put the death toll at 893 service members, plus two civilian Defense Department employees. There have been five military personnel reported killed since the last Pentagon update.

The number of US casualties has dropped considerably from its high point in April, when 135 troops were killed during the

THE DAY'S TOLL



- At least 11 people including a US soldier were killed in a string of attacks in the Iraqi capital and known rebel hotspots on Wednesday
- Four US Marines were killed in action in separate incidents in Anbar Province, a Sunni-dominated area west of Baghdad
- A roadside bomb exploded early today killing one US 1st Infantry Division soldier and injuring six others north of the Iraqi capital
- Two people were killed and four wounded when a missile ripped through the seventh floor of the Adnan Khairallah hospital on the Tigris river in Baghdad

worst outbreak of anti-coalition violence since the end of major hostilities on May 1, 2003.

The drop in casualties to pre-April levels followed a Marine pullout from the city of Fallujah — the scene of heavy fighting — and a series of informal cease fires with Shia militants who had fought US forces in Baghdad and across central and southern Iraq.

The new threats against Poland, Japan and Bulgaria were worrying signs that militants may be emboldened by their success against the Philippines.

The US and other coalition allies had criticised the government for agreeing to withdraw its 51-member contingent to save the life of truck driver Angelo dela Cruz, who was kidnapped two weeks ago.

The same group that kidnapped dela Cruz, the Khaled bin al-Waleed Corps, took aim at Japan. The group is the military wing of Tawhid and Jihad, the group led by Jordanian militant Abu Musab al-Zarqawi.

"To the government of Japan: Do what the Philippines has done. By God, nobody will protect you and we are not going to tolerate anybody," said a statement signed by the group. "Lines of cars laden with explosives are awaiting you; we will not stop, God willing."

A new statement signed Tawhid and Jihad on Wednesday cautioned readers to trust only statements posted on the group's behalf by Abu-Maysara al-Iraqi, the pen name of a frequent contributor to sites known for militant Muslim content. The threat against Japan was not posted by Abu-Maysara al-Iraqi.

While Tawhid and Jihad — a name referring to the central Islamic tenet of monotheism and to holy war — has claimed many attacks, it rarely issues threats or warnings. It earlier claimed responsibility for beheading US businessman Nicholas Berg and South Korean translator Kim Sun-il.

An online statement from a previously unknown group that identified itself as al-Qaida's European branch contained threats to carry out deadly attacks in Bulgaria and Poland if the two countries don't withdraw their troops from Iraq.



FREEDOM CRY Freed Filipino hostage Angelo de la Cruz is reunited with wife Arsenia (right) on Wednesday on his arrival at a hotel in Abu Dhabi after leaving Iraq.

Head of slain US hostage found

Associated Press
Riyadh, July 21

THE HEAD of slain American hostage Paul M. Johnson Jr, who was kidnapped and beheaded by militants in Saudi Arabia last month, was found by Saudi security forces during a raid on a militant hideout that left two militants dead, Interior Ministry said today.

In a statement broadcast on Saudi al-Ekhbariya television, the Interior Ministry said the head was found in a freezer in an apartment. The statement said the rest of the body was not found.

The US Embassy in Riyadh issued a statement saying the Saudi authorities had informed it that they had found "what they believe to be the head of Paul Johnson".

The statement said the consular



Paul M. Johnson

section was in the process of notifying Johnson's family in order to identify the head.

Johnson, a 49-year-old engineer, was kidnapped on June 12. An al-Qaida group claiming responsibility posted an Internet message that showed grisly photographs of a beheaded body on June 17. Later, video of the beheading was posted.

Hours after the pictures of the

beheading appeared on the internet, Saudi security forces shot and killed Abdulaziz al-Moqrin, alleged mastermind of Johnson's kidnapping and beheading.

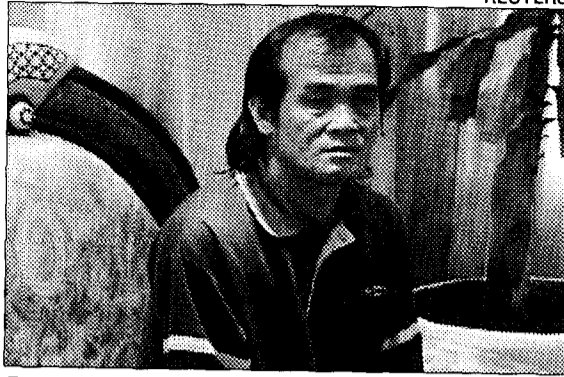
Last week, US authorities announced that the search for Johnson's body had been called off.

Japan vows to stay put

Japan has vowed to keep its troops in Iraq despite apparent threats from a group linked to al-Qaida, after Philippine forces bowed to kidnappers' demands that they pull out to save the life of a hostage.

In Tokyo, Deputy Cabinet Secretary Masaaki Yamazaki said on Wednesday Japan was checking the credibility of the threat state but said its stance on Iraq remained unchanged.

REUTERS



Filipino hostage Angelo de la Cruz soon after his release in Baghdad on Tuesday.

Hostage freed after pullout

Reuters
Baghdad, July 20

Egyptian driver Mohammed al-Gharabawi was also freed after the Saudi firm he worked for met kidnappers' demands by promising to stop doing work in Iraq.

A FILIPINO truck driver held hostage in Iraq was freed on Tuesday, a day after Manila withdrew its troops in response to demands from kidnappers who had threatened to behead him. The US and Iraq's interim government have accused Manila of caving in to terrorists, but Philippine President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo defended the decision and said the father of eight did not deserve to die.

The kidnappers dropped Angelo de la Cruz at the UAE embassy in Baghdad on Tuesday morning, a source at the mission said. A correspondent later saw him arriving by car at the Philippine embassy. Television footage from inside the UAE embassy showed de la Cruz, 46, sitting with Philippine and UAE officials. He looked tired, but in good health.

Arroyo said she made the decision to withdraw the troops early because of the importance of looking after some eight million Filipino workers abroad. "A father of eight, Angelo has become a Filipino everyman, a symbol of the hardworking Filipino seeking hope and opportunity", said Arroyo, who spoke to de la Cruz by telephone.

Threat to Japan

The Islamic militant group blamed for deadly attacks on both foreign and local interests in Iraq warned Japan on Tuesday that long lines of car-bombs awaited its troops if it did not follow the example of the Philippines and withdrew. "To the government of Japan: do what the Philippines has done. By God, nobody will protect you and we're not going to tolerate anybody", said an online statement signed by the Khalid bin al-Waleed Brigade, the military wing of the Tawhid and Jihad group.



Arsenia de la Cruz, wife of Angelo, talks to her husband on Tuesday.

Under pressure, Arafat backs off to defuse crisis

Gaza, July 19 (Reuters): Backing down in the face of unprecedented unrest, Yasser Arafat scrambled today to defuse a Palestinian leadership crisis triggered by turmoil in Gaza over corruption in his government and security forces.

The Palestinian President tried to calm public anger in the Gaza Strip by naming a new security chief over the head of a cousin whose appointment fuelled a weekend of violence spearheaded by gunmen demanding anti-corruption reforms.

But Prime Minister Ahmed Qurie kept up pressure on Arafat, saying his resignation — tendered in frustration after what he called an explosion of “chaos and lawlessness” — would stand for now.

Arafat, a former guerrilla leader, is facing the sharpest challenge to his rule since Palestinians received a measure of self-rule a decade ago, and some fear it could eventually boil over in civil war. The confrontation is also widely seen as a power struggle between Arafat's Old Guard and younger rivals staking out turf before Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon carries out a plan to remove Jewish set-



Yasser Arafat cuts a cake at his headquarters in Ramallah during a meeting with students and teachers. (AFP)

tlements from Gaza by the end of 2005.

Adding to tensions in the region, a bomb killed a senior member of Lebanese guerrilla group Hizbollah in the southern suburbs of Beirut today in an attack the group blamed on Israel.

Under intense public pressure to overhaul his security apparatus, Arafat named Abdel-

Razek al-Majaideh to the new post of overall director of security for the West Bank and Gaza, outranking Moussa Arafat, the cousin widely seen as a symbol of entrenched cronyism, officials said.

The reinstatement of Majaideh, a veteran commander who resigned earlier this month at Arafat's request, was greeted

by supporters firing automatic weapons in the air.

Gunmen opposed to Moussa Arafat, appointed Gaza security chief on Saturday, had battled security forces yesterday in clashes that left 18 people wounded. Under the new arrangement, Moussa Arafat will retain a senior security post in Gaza.

Compounding Arafat's woes was Qurie's decision on Saturday to tender his resignation after brief abductions on Friday of four French aid workers, a police chief and another official in Gaza. Arafat rejected Qurie's resignation yesterday.

After a cabinet meeting today, Qurie said his resignation would stand pending a written response from Arafat. “However, most of the ministers in the cabinet are against this resignation,” Qurie said, signalling that he could still rescind it.

Judge shot dead

An Israeli judge was found shot dead in a car near his home outside Tel Aviv today and a Palestinian militant group claimed responsibility. Justice Minister Yosef Lapid reported the killing in Israel's parliament but said it was not known who targeted the judge.

Government keeps statements vague to buy time

Manila readies to pull out

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Manila, July 14 (Reuters): The Philippines was preparing today to withdraw troops from Iraq to save the life of a Filipino hostage, but kept its actual plans unclear as the military said it had yet to receive orders to leave.

Militants threatened to behead truck driver Angelo de la Cruz unless Philippine troops leave by July 20, a month early, leaving President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo with a dilemma between saving his life and maintaining her close alliance with Washington. The air force said it had put two transport planes on standby in Manila to begin an evacuation of troops if ordered.

A statement from foreign affairs secretary Delia Albert, following news a Bulgarian hostage in Iraq had been executed, said Filipino troops in Baghdad had fallen to 43 from 51.

But she did not say when the cut was made and police and military officials could not account

for the eight personnel. A military spokesman said no order to pull out had been received.

"The department of foreign affairs is coordinating with the defence ministry for the withdrawal of troops," Albert said in her statement. "The headcount of the Philippine troops now in Baghdad from 51 is 43."

A foreign ministry official said de la Cruz is safe and not in danger of beheading and may return home as early as tomorrow.

Officials said none of Manila's personnel, consisting of 43 soldiers and eight police, had left Iraq. A police official from the department in charge of the Iraq deployment said the eight police officers had not moved from their base south of Baghdad. "They are still there," Major Honario Agulla said. "They are waiting for a decision from higher up."

The US has been pressuring the Philippines not to bow to kid-

nappers by withdrawing ahead of schedule. US officials in Manila said ambassador Francis Ricciardone met with Arroyo yesterday, and that it was still not clear if Philippine troops were withdrawing from Iraq.

Statements by Philippine officials have been consistently vague since the deputy foreign secretary said on Monday that Manila would pull out as soon as possible, but gave no date.

One analyst said it suggested a policy of playing for time by implying a withdrawal to keep the hostage alive, or to win his release, without making substantial changes in the deployment. "They probably are trying to bide for time," said Rex Robles, a retired navy officer who runs a security agency. The deputy foreign minister did not clarify whether Manila planned to pull out its troops by July 20. The troops were already scheduled to depart on August 20.



A family picture of Bulgarian Georgi Lazov who was executed by militants in Iraq. (AFP)

Confusion over Manila pullout

Manila, July 13 (Reuters): The Philippine army awaited word today on whether it would withdraw from Iraq earlier than scheduled amid deepening confusion over Manila's response to militants threatening to behead a hostage if its troops stay.

The Bush administration warned the Philippines today against bowing to pressure from kidnappers and withdrawing the country's troops from Iraq ahead of schedule. "While this is a decision for the Philippine government, we believe such a decision would send the wrong signal to terrorists around the globe," a senior Bush administration official said.

Foreign secretary Delia Albert repeated a statement by her deputy that the Philippines would withdraw "as soon as possible" but did not clarify whether Manila plans to pull out its troops by July 20 in line with demands by militants holding Angelo de la Cruz.

"When deputy foreign minister Rafael Seguis spoke this morning during his interview with al Jazeera, he spoke with foreknowledge and full authority of the Philippine government," Albert said after an emergency foreign office meeting in Manila.

Seguis told the Arabic al Jazeera television station that

Manila was offering to withdraw its forces as soon as possible, but gave no date. Officials in Manila declined to clarify or to say if they would leave much earlier than their scheduled August 20 departure.

An army spokesman said no official order to withdraw had been received and the family of De la Cruz was sceptical after a

series of misleading government statements since the crisis began with the abduction of the 46-year-old truck driver last week. "We have not had an order from any office regarding the pull-out," army spokesman Daniel Lucero said. "We are prepared to implement our withdrawal plan."

A senior army officer said it was possible to pull out the small Philippine contingent within three days, in line with militants' demands for a withdrawal by July 20, but that it would require logistical assistance from the US. President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo's government had previously said it would not change plans to withdraw its 51 soldiers, all working on humanitarian projects, as scheduled on August 20.

She faces a dilemma between trying to save De la Cruz, who comes from her home province, and maintaining her staunch alliance with the US.

500 held in Baghdad raids

is more than we expected," he said, adding that those held included suspected drug dealers and weapons traders.

He said the raids would continue in the Rusafa area, and would be expanded to other areas of the capital. In the 15 months since the US-led war that toppled Saddam Hussein, there has been widespread lawlessness in Baghdad and throughout the country.

Baghdad, July 13 (Reuters): Iraqi police seized more than 500 criminal suspects in raids in Baghdad today, an interior ministry source said.

"Till now the police have arrested 527 people in Rusafa," the source said, referring to a swathe of Baghdad on the east bank of the Tigris river. He said the raids had begun in the early hours and were still under way. "The number (of detainees)



A woman prays for the quick release of Angelo de la Cruz in Buenavista town, northern Philippines. (AFP)

17/7
Manila
17/7

Manila rejects hostage deadline

Baghdad, July 11 (Reuters): A Filipino hostage in Iraq slipped into graver peril today after Manila rejected his captors' demands for an early withdrawal of Filipino troops.

Death threats also hung over two Bulgarian truck drivers, but Sofia said it was growing more confident they had survived a Friday night execution deadline set by their kidnappers.

"In line with our commitment to the free people of Iraq, we reiterate our plan to return our humanitarian contingent as scheduled on August 20, 2004," Philippine foreign secretary Della Albert said in Manila.

Militants holding truck driver Angelo de la Cruz vowed to kill him by tonight unless Manila pledged its 51-strong humanitarian force would go home by July 20. De la Cruz had appeared close to release last night before his captors issued a fresh death threat.

"Yesterday was a false hope, he was not released but we are hoping he will soon be free," said a Philippine embassy source in Baghdad. He said he had heard nothing since the kidnappers

had extended their deadline to kill the 46-year-old driver.

There was no firm word on the fate of the two Bulgarians, but their government said it had more signs they were alive.

"Today we have more reasons than yesterday to believe that there has been no radical change in the situation of the Bulgarian hostages in Iraq," foreign ministry spokeswoman Gergana Grancharova told state radio.

"There are still many tense hours ahead. I do not want to leave the false impression of undue optimism," she said.

Amid the twists and turns of the hostage crisis, guerrillas struck in northern Iraq, killing a soldier in a US taskforce with a roadside bomb attack on a convoy south of Mosul.

The US military said the blast also wounded another soldier and killed an Iraqi civilian who had been driving behind the convoy. The convoy then came under fire from a speeding car. American troops fired back, killing the driver.

Insurgents slit the throat of an Iraqi translator employed by US forces in the northern city of

Kirkuk. Police found his body in a river yesterday. A police captain was wounded when gunmen shot at his vehicle southwest of the city the same day.

Hostage-takers kept nerves taut as Bulgaria and the Philippines agonised over the fate of their nationals. "The hostage will remain captive and treated as a prisoner under Islam until the last Filipino soldier leaves Iraq by latest July 20...or he will be executed," the Islamic Army in Iraq group said in a statement quoted on Al Jazeera television.

"We give the Philippine government an additional 24 hours starting from 11 pm Iraqi time (1900 GMT) on Saturday to show it is serious about withdrawing its troops."

Government officials in Manila had said earlier De la Cruz was being taken to a Baghdad hotel, prompting premature celebrations by his family, friends and well-wishers.

The abductors of the Bulgarians had said they would kill Georgi Lazov, 30, and Ivailo Kepov, 32, late on Friday unless US-led forces freed prisoners in Iraq.

Pull out or lose hostage, Manila told

Iraqi abductors set 24-hour deadline for troops withdrawal announcement

Agence France-Presse
Doha, July 11

THE IRAQI kidnappers of a Filipino have threatened to behead him unless Manila announces in 24 hours its decision to pull its troops out of the country. "The group extended its ultimatum to the Philippines to withdraw its troops from Iraq for another 24 hours starting at 11 pm Iraqi time," said a statement broadcast by Al-Jazeera TV.

But the Philippines government has said it won't withdraw its troops from Iraq before the August 20 departure date. Angelo de la Cruz, 46, a truck driver, was abducted at Fallujah after he entered Iraq from Saudi Arabia.

The Islamic Army in Iraq, or Khaled Ibn al-Walid Brigade, said if Manila proves its intentions, de la Cruz "will become a prisoner and will be treated the way prisoners are treated according to Islamic law till the last Filipino soldier leaves Iraq no later than July 20."

Late tonight, a Filipino diplomat held out hope for the hostage when he said the abductors had extended the deadline by nine days. "I am told that the deadline has been extended by nine days till July 20," the diplomat said in Baghdad.

But a couple of hours later he retracted his statement, saying he had misread the abductor's message. "I misinterpreted the whole thing as an Arab-speaking gentleman gave us the wrong interpretation. I thought the deadline was for the hostage but that is not the case so the 11 pm deadline today exists and we do not know what happens after that."

The dramatic turn of events followed reports from Manila, saying President Gloria Machapagal Arroyo had told de la Cruz's family that he had already been released.

Earlier, after an emergency four-hour Cabinet meeting in Manila, the Philippines foreign secretary Delia Albert said: "We continue to do everything we can in order to secure the release of de la Cruz." He said de la Cruz's wife and brother would be flown to Iraq with labour secretary Patricia Santo Tomas "in order to be closer to the developments on the ground."



A Filipino child lights up a candle outside the home of Angelo de la Cruz while relatives and friends pray in Buenavista village on Sunday.

Saddam was no threat to US, says report

Agencies
New York/Baghdad/Sydney,
July 11

THE US Senate's report on pre-war intelligence about Iraq, which asserts that warnings about its illicit weapons were largely unfounded and that its ties to the al-Qaida were tenuous, undermines yet another justification for the war: that Saddam Hussein's military posed a threat to US interests.

In a detailed discussion of Iraq's pre-war military posture, a media report cites a long series of intelligence reports in the decade before the war that described a formerly potent army's spiral of decay under the weight of economic sanctions and US military pressure.

The main risk of an attack by Hussein against the US and nations in the region was his unpredictability, these reports in-

dicated. They found it especially hard to predict what he would do if threatened by the likelihood of American military action.

But the Senate Intelligence Committee called this analysis relatively weak, *The New York Times* said.

The committee's report, the paper says, implies that war opponents were essentially correct when they argued that Iraq posed little immediate threat to the US.

Before the war, those who held this view, both in Congress and at the UN, argued that continued containment was preferable to an invasion. Although the report described a profound breakdown in the US intelligence system, both White House and congressional officials said the political calendar would prevent any serious action until after the November elections, the *Times* said. The paper said the

Bush administration had emphasised that the war was worthwhile because it removed a threatening dictator from power.

After reviewing about 400 analytical documents written by the intelligence agencies from 1991, after the first Gulf War, to 2003 the committee unanimously concluded that "the body of assessments showed that Iraqi military capabilities had steadily degraded following defeat in the first Gulf war in 1991. Analysts also believed those capabilities would continue to erode as long as economic sanctions remained in place".

'Bush misled US'

Criticising President George W. Bush's policies on Iraq, his democratic challengers John Kerry and John Edwards have alleged the incumbent had "misled America" in

the run-up to the war and that a slipshod intelligence invoked to invade Baghdad had cost the nation lives, billions of dollars and international prestige.

4 Marines killed

FOUR US marines were killed near the flashpoint city of Fallujah while on patrol, a US military statement said on Sunday.

"Four Marines assigned to the 1st Marine Expeditionary Force died in al-Anbar Province on Saturday while conducting security and stability operations", a US military statement said. A US military spokesman later said the attack was near Fallujah, west of Baghdad.

The latest casualties bring to 657 the number of US troops killed in action in Iraq since the beginning of the US-led war in March 2003.

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12/7

Blair in trouble over Iraq WMD claim

By Gaby Hinsliff and Antony Barnett

LONDON, JULY 11. The British Prime Minister, Tony Blair's claim that the former Iraqi president, Saddam Hussein, posed a 'current and serious' threat to Britain is challenged by dramatic new allegations today that Britain's spy chiefs have retracted the intelligence on which it was based.

The supposed proof that the Iraqi leader held old stockpiles and was still trying, even in the run-up to war, to produce chemical and biological weapons became crucial to the Prime Minister's case for urgent military action rather than waiting for inspectors to finish their task.

Yet spy chiefs at MI6 have since taken the rare step of withdrawing the intelligence assessment that underpinned Mr. Blair's case, according to a

senior intelligence source interviewed on BBC television tonight — an admission that it was fundamentally unreliable.

The charge leaves Mr. Blair open to serious questions over why he did not come clean earlier that the evidence of supposed WMD was crumbling beneath him.

It will increase speculation that he may be forced to disown large chunks of the now controversial September dossier on banned weapons when Lord Butler publishes his long-awaited report this week on the handling of intelligence on Iraq.

Yesterday, Britain's leading churchman, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, weighed into the debate, warning that Mr. Blair would be judged before God for his actions and suggesting he would be condemned to struggle with his conscience.

Asked how Mr. Blair would have to account for himself to his Maker, Archbishop Williams answered: 'At the judgment seat'. For Christians, that is the point of entry either to heaven or to hell.

"When you acknowledge that you have taken a risk which has not paid off, which has cost, and that cost does not seem to be justified, that's the punishment," he added.

The fresh blow comes with Mr. Blair and the intelligence services braced for sweeping criticisms from the Butler report over the way they handled the public case for war.

Mr. Blair's allies fear that if the report is genuinely damaging it could provoke fresh attempts among supporters of Finance Minister, Gordon Brown, to force the Prime Minister to stand down. — ©Guardian Newspapers Limited 2004

THE HINDU

12 Jul 2004

New law in Iraq gives PM emergency powers

By Edward Wong

Baghdad: Prime Minister Iyad Allawi on Tuesday signed into law broad emergency powers that allow him to impose curfews anywhere in the country, ban groups he considers seditious and order the detentions of people suspected of being security risks.



Iyad Allawi

Putting a law in place that permits him to establish emergency powers is one of the first official actions that Allawi has taken against a tenacious insurgency and lays the groundwork for a forceful response to civil unrest. The law was written with the input of lawyers and the ministers of justice and of human rights, he said. His hardline approach had already become apparent in his office's announcement that Iraqi forces provided the American military with intelligence for a Monday air strike on what was described as a rebel safe house in Falluja.

Sceptics say the Iraqi security forces do not have the numbers, weapons or training to enforce emergency law and will need to lean heavily on American forces. Allawi said that the government was "beefing up these resources" and that "Iraqis should shoulder the responsibility, should be the people who enforce law and order in Iraq and against the terrorists."

A draft of the law obtained by The New

York Times independently of Allawi's office stated that the prime minister has the right to "impose restrictions on the freedoms of citizens or foreigners in Iraq" in the event of a "dangerous threat" or "the occurrence of armed instability that threatens state institutions or its infrastructure."

The restrictions include the curtailing or banning of travel, group meetings and the possession of weapons. The prime minister also has the power to take direct control of all security and intelligence forces in the area under emergency rule.

Allawi, a former Baath Party official who worked from abroad against Saddam Hussein, has tried to strike a balance in dealing with the insurgency. He said he had opened negotiations with those insurgents who were not hardcore fighters and had offered the possibility of amnesty to them. But he also wants to show he can rule with an iron fist. "There are people who have been doing things around the periphery and who call themselves the resistance," he said. "I told them: 'What are you trying to achieve, let us know. Do you want to bring Saddam back to rule Iraq; do you want to bring bin Laden to rule Iraq? We will fight you.'" But he said they would be welcomed into the political process if they severed their relations "to the hardcore and to the criminals and the terrorists."

The law was signed by American administrators and Iraqi Governing Council members in early March and functions as an interim constitution. The New York Times

New security steps in Iraq

Associated Press

BAGHDAD, July 7. — The Iraqi government announced a package of new security measures today, allowing the Prime Minister to announce martial law in chaotic areas, in an effort to put down the insurgency plaguing the country.

"The lives of the Iraqi people are in danger, they are in danger from evil forces, from gangs of terrorists," said human rights minister Mr Bakhityar Amin, who compared the new law to the US Patriot Act. Mr Amin said the new security law was needed to combat insurgents who are "preventing government employees from reporting for work, preventing foreign workers from entering the country to help rebuild Iraq and trying to derail general elections".

The law gives interim Prime Minister Mr Iyad Allawi the right, after he receives unanimous approval from the Cabinet, to assign curfews to specific areas, to conduct cordon and search operations and detain individuals carrying weapons. It also lets him assign governors, including military leaders, to be in charge of specific areas.



TOO CLOSE FOR COMFORT: Mr Allawi's neighbour inspects his house after a blast on Wednesday. — AFP

Iran's warning

TEHERAN, July 7. — Iran's defence minister, Rear Admiral Ali Shamkhani, has warned that the Islamic republic would abandon its commitments to the UN atomic watchdog if its nuclear installations were attacked. "If there is a military attack... it would be necessary to renounce all of our nuclear commitments," he said. — AFP

Justice minister Mr Malik Dohan al-Hassan said the premier would need to get war-

rants from an Iraqi court before he could take each step and said martial law could only be declared for 60 days or for the duration of the specific violence, whichever is shorter.

But even as the government took its first decisive move to quell the chaos, a rash of violence broke out throughout the capital. Masked insurgents and Iraqi forces backed by US troops and helicopters waged a gunbattle near Martyrs' Square. At least four people were killed and 20 others injured in the massive battle, according to Mr Saad al-Amili, a health ministry official.

Elsewhere in Baghdad, four mortar rounds shook a neighbourhood near the headquarters of Mr Allawi's political party this morning, wounding six people, an interior ministry official said. The attacks, on a stretch of Zeitoun Street in central Baghdad, also hit near a home used by Mr Allawi, who was not present.

Saddam's nephew held

One of Saddam Hussein's nephews was arrested along with a Moroccan on the Jordanian border, Iraq's human rights minister said today, reports AFP. He, however, did not mention any date.

USA airlifted uranium to prevent misuse

WASHINGTON, July 7. — Ahead of the 28 June handover of sovereignty, the USA had secretly airlifted nearly two tonnes of low-enriched uranium and 1,000 radioactive samples from Iraq to prevent misuse by terrorists to make "dirty" bombs or to support any nuclear weapons programme, a senior US official revealed. Energy secretary Mr Spencer Abraham announced that the radioactive materials were removed from Tuwaitha Nuclear Centre and the airlift was completed on 23 June "to keep potentially dangerous nuclear materials out of the hands of terrorists". Less sensitive materials, used for medical, agricultural or industrial purposes, have been left in Iraq, Mr Abraham said yesterday.

The International Atomic Energy Agency, which, in the pre-war period, had kept the Tuwaitha uranium under seal, was told in advance of the removal. — PTI

Gaddafi's daughter to help defend Saddam



Kuwaiti lawyers address a Press conference in Kuwait City on Saturday. They intend to travel to Iraq in order to press additional charges against Saddam Hussein.

Libyan team of lawyers to assure fair trial for Hussein

Associated Press
Amman, July 3

THE DAUGHTER of Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi will help defend Saddam Hussein in court, a Jordanian lawyer and member of the legal team representing the former Iraqi dictator said on Friday.

Aisha Muammar Gaddafi, a law professor, will form a Libyan law experts team to defend Saddam Hussein, Ziad al-Khasawneh said. "The daughter of the Libyan President is welcomed to join us, and we consider her as an official member of the team," he said.

Al-Khasawneh added that the Jordanian-based multinational defence team had called Gaddafi on Thursday to offer their thanks. A statement issued late on Thursday by a charity association headed by Gaddafi's daughter, in her late 20s, said she wanted to guarantee Saddam received a "fair trial (based on) the principle that all accused should be presumed innocent until proven guilty".

The statement, from the association's office in the Libyan capital, Tripoli, said several Libyan lawyers will join Saddam's defence team, which already includes lawyers from Jordan, Lebanon, Tunisia and Western countries such as the United States, Britain, France and Belgium.

Saddam and 11 other defendants, all former members of the ousted Iraqi regime, faced court in Baghdad for the first time on Thursday on war crimes and genocide charges. Defence lawyers were not present for the brief arraignment. Saddam's lawyers have complained of being kept in the dark concerning their client's case, because they did not receive answers to their request to the American administration, the International Committee for the Red Cross and the Iraqi authorities to meet with the ex-Iraqi leader and be present when he was indicted.

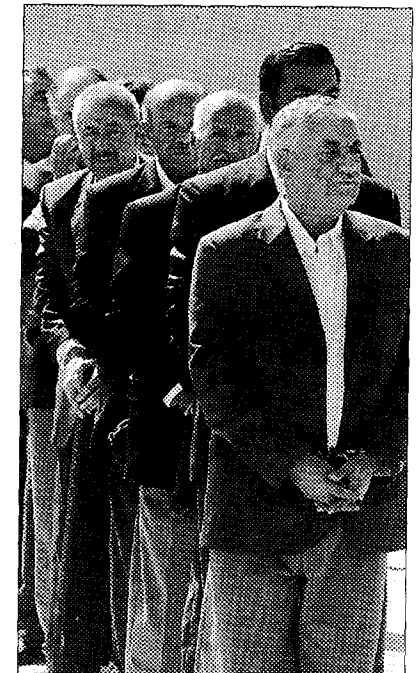
Al-Khasawneh said a member of the team, top Arab Lawyers Union official Mohammed al-Alaqui, arrived on Thursday in Jordan from Libya to help in Saddam's defence.

Jordanian Mohammed Rashdan, who heads the defence team, is waiting in Amman for assurances that the team can safely travel to Iraq.

Days after Saddam's December 13 capture, the former dictator's wife, Sajida Khairallah Telfah, asked Rashdan to defend her husband, the lawyer said. Ziad Tariq Aziz, the son of former Iraqi Deputy Prime Minister Tariq Aziz, appointed Rashdan's team on Thursday to defend his father.

At an Arab summit in May, Gaddafi said she was "disgusted" that the 22-member Arab League had not done enough to represent Saddam. "What's the significance of this Arab gathering?" Gaddafi said before packing up and leaving the summit venue, Tunis. "How can this summit convene while there are two Arab presidents in jail?"

Gaddafi was referring to Saddam and Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat, who has been holed up in his West Bank headquarters for more than two years, besieged by Israeli forces.



AP
ENDLESS WAIT: Former Iraqi senior leaders are led into a courtroom in chains on Thursday.

Iraq in chains

W. Menon
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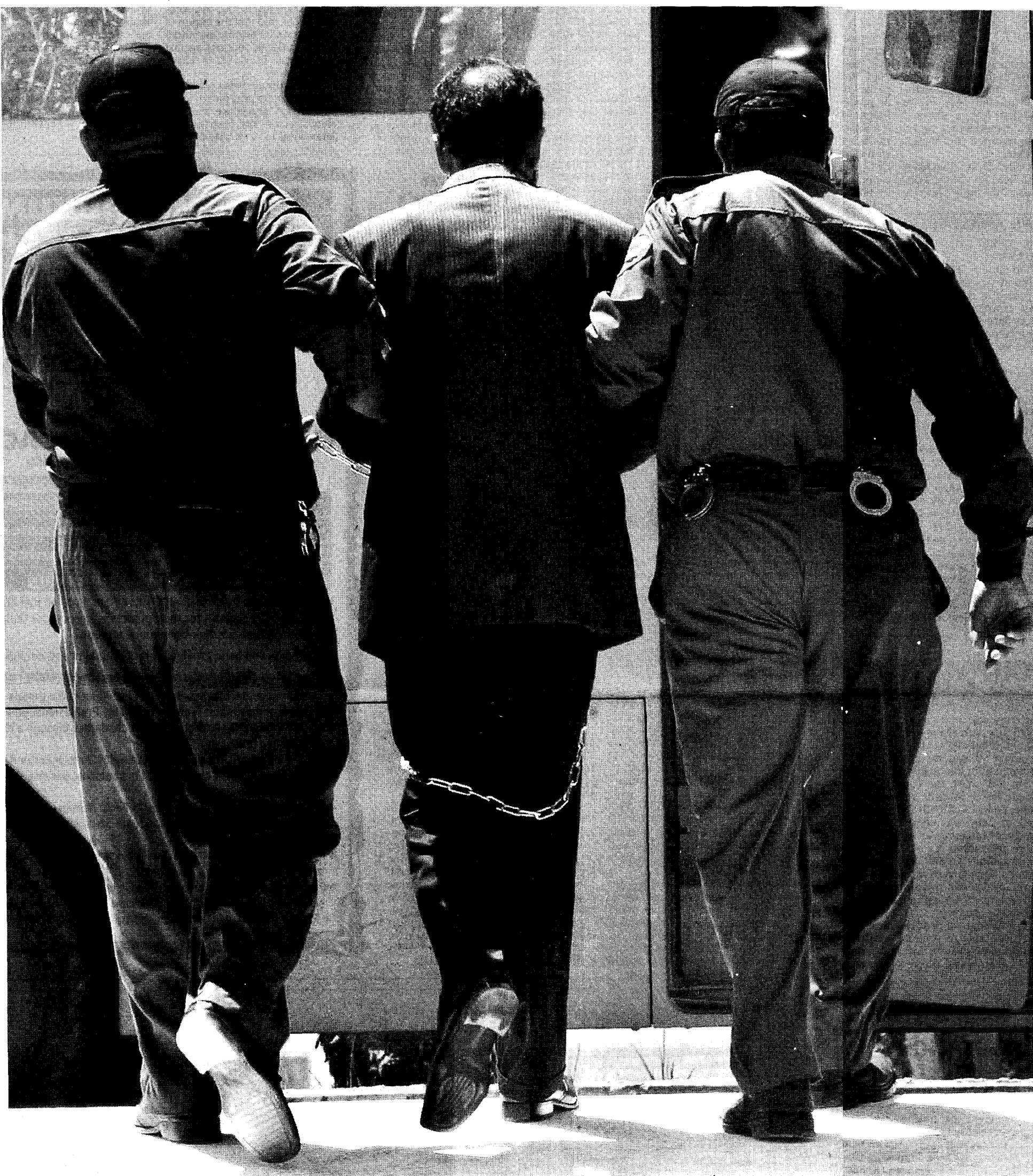
THE UNITED States President, George W. Bush, apparently believes that he has devised a viable strategy to distance his administration from the quagmire in Iraq. An interim Cabinet has been established, executive power transferred to it and an embassy has replaced the Coalition Provisional Authority as the link between Washington and the supposedly sovereign Government in Baghdad. However, few people in the world other than Mr. Bush and his ardent admirers actually believe that conditions have changed in any real sense.

A declaration that sovereignty has been transferred to the Iraqis is laughable when an occupation force of over 1,50,000 troops backed by the air power and tanks of the world's most powerful military continues to operate in the country. While the Ministers of the interim Government might have taken nominal charge of the departments, they hardly have much freedom to operate when they must follow the instructions of embedded foreign "advisors." The new Government may now be able to directly access oil revenues but the contracts for reconstruction were handed over to companies headquartered in the invading countries long ago. Interim Prime Minister Iyad Allawi and the rest of his Cabinet live in and operate from buildings located inside a high security zone protected by the U.S., with hardly any contact with the citizens of Iraq.

If sovereignty is a sham, the promise of democracy is likely to be just as farcical. The main task before the interim Government is to prepare the ground for elections by the end of 2004 or before February 2005 at the latest. Since the preparations cannot be properly made when an insurgency is raging in the country, the Government has to try and restore stability before it can do anything else. The interim set-up is trying to raise security forces of its own but it is not certain that these forces will be available in time or that they will ever be effective. Under the circumstances, the Allawi Government will look to the occupation forces to continue with the so-far abortive effort to pacify the country. As the occupation forces carry out an aggressive campaign against the forces of national resistance, they are bound to cause more death and destruction, which, in turn, will fuel insurgency. This is the most likely scenario, but there might well be an even more bizarre twist in the tale that is yet to unfold.

It was perhaps no coincidence that the shape of the interim Iraqi Government was firmed up soon after Jordan's King Abdullah met with Mr. Bush. The Hashemite monarch suggested that such a Government could be effective if a strong man was appointed to head it. While Mr. Allawi's elevation to the post took place only after back-room manoeuvring between the U.S. Defence Department on the one hand and a Central Intelligence Agency/State Department combination on the other, he undoubtedly fits the bill. Mr. Allawi was reputedly a Ba'ath party enforcer when he was in college and is believed to be conversant with the tactics that the party employed to retain power for more than three decades.

Given this background, the first pronouncements on security affairs made by the new Government did not come as a surprise. Within hours of stepping into the Premiership, Mr. Allawi floated the idea that the Government might impose martial law. Spokesmen for the world's oldest and most powerful democracies concurred without a trace of misgiving. Both the American and British Governments said they would not oppose the imposition of martial law if the new, "independent" Government in Baghdad felt that such a step was necessary. A few days later, another senior offi-



Saddam Hussein is led away from a courtroom in Baghdad. — Photo: Reuters

Saddam Hussein might have become a figure of the past but the Iraqi resistance will fight on, says Kesava Menon.

cial went a step further and declared that the Government was waiting for the Westerners to get out of the way so that it could resort to time-tested methods. Foreigners, he explained, did not possess the "culture" that would enable them to effectively deal with the insurgency.

From these statements, it is possible to discern the course the interim Government is likely to follow. In adopting the culture of the hard regimes of the Arab world, Mr. Alla-

wi and his cohorts will rely on the *mukhbarat*, the intelligence agencies. They have already begun doing so. According to reports, a U.S. military unit recently rescued several men from a government building where they were being beaten up by a group of fellow Iraqis. The Iraqi

intelligence personnel were reported to have made an interesting remark when the Americans told them to stop beating their prisoners — that unlike American prison guards, they had at least not raped the detainees.

With the Allawi Government ap-

parently setting up an intelligence apparatus, it will try to apply the time-tested methods that the other Arab regimes have used for years. The intelligence services will be used to intimidate and bring in line various segments of Iraqi society beginning with the fledgling mil-

itary and police forces. Mr. Allawi has already hinted that he is not happy with the January 2005 deadline for holding elections. There is a chance that as the deadline approaches, statements will be issued calling for a postponement of the elections. It will be argued that the situation is still too delicate and that stability must be fully restored before the country embarks on a possibly disruptive democratic exercise.

The Bush administration's claim that it seeks to nurture democracy in the Arab world will be fully exposed if developments take such a course. But this administration has changed the goal-posts so often that (if it is still around after the U.S. presidential election) it might well claim that the restoration of stability in Iraq was its objective all along.

The U.S. may also not have a problem living with a one-party or one-person rule in Iraq. After all, it continues to deal with several other dictatorships in the Arab world.

However, Mr. Allawi is likely to discover that he cannot control his country even with a ruthless intelligence service and a reconstituted military force. With the U.S. spending billions of dollars for the reconstitution of the Iraqi military, hundreds of young men have turned up at the recruitment centres. This is not a surprise given the lack of other avenues of employment.

But even the American trainers admit that only a handful is likely to become reliable soldiers. An overwhelming majority of the recruits who have been interviewed asserted that they would never fight their compatriots. The new recruits are not likely to be any different from the personnel of units raised earlier and ordered to fight against insurgents in Fallujah. These units either melted away, openly rebelled or deserted to the camps of the insurgents.

The Allawi-centred contraption might seek to emulate other Arab regimes. But it lacks the vital element that has enabled these regimes to survive for so long — bedrock nationalism. The regimes in Egypt, Syria and Libya have not survived only because they command brutal enforcement mechanisms. These regimes were created by groups of men, usually military officers, who were bound together by a sense of common purpose. Each of these regimes might have been corrupted by power.

However, the people who run these regimes know that they must not only support one another but also uphold the national cause at some basic level. There has not been any indication that Mr. Allawi or other members of his Cabinet have been able to establish a connection with the people of Iraq who still view them as irrelevant outsiders.

The national resistance retains the political and military initiative. Those who are trying to suppress the resistance have no clue to its size, organisational structure or leadership. The occupation forces have not been able to form a clear idea about the nature of their opponents. They sometimes describe the insurgency as consisting of separate bands loosely tied together.

At other times, they say that a Ba'ath party remnant or a religious network provides the insurgency with internal coherence. The truth probably lies somewhere in between. Those who are active in the insurgency might have arrived at some idea of an hierarchical order over the year during which they have waged their campaign, even if an organisational structure did not exist in the first place. For instance, the insurgents in each district or town can probably identify the people who lead the insurgency in adjoining areas. With such knowledge, each band can support another and will also probably have some idea of which band has been active and which has not.

While the resistance fighters have not issued any statement in support of the overthrown President, Saddam Hussein, or railed against his imprisonment, the defiance that he showed at his trial will have a resonance. This defiance is what the insurgency is all about. Saddam Hussein might have become a figure of the past but the Iraqi resistance will fight on.

SATURDAY, JULY 3, 2004

SADDAM'S TRIAL

IRAQ'S OVERTHROWN PRESIDENT, Saddam Hussein, will be forced to confront the record of brutality he set over years in power during the course of a trial that is likely to last several months. In preliminary hearings before a special tribunal on Thursday, the deposed ruler was formally indicted for crimes committed against his own people and those of a neighbouring country. Mr. Hussein is accused of masterminding the murder of religious leaders in 1974; the gassing of Kurds in Halabja in 1988; the killing of the Kurdish Barzani clan in 1983; the assassination of political rivals in the last 30 years; the "Anfal" campaign to displace Kurds in 1986-88; the 1990 invasion of Kuwait and, the suppression of the uprising by Kurds and Shias in 1991. There will be no lack of evidence since other Governments, human rights groups and the international media gathered information as these outrages were being committed. The relatives and others representing the people victimised by the Ba'athist regime waited for years to see Mr. Hussein brought to justice and they can now be expected to try and substantiate the charges. In particular, the people of Kuwait claim to have documented proof of the murders, abductions and plunder carried out by Iraqi forces during the seven month-long occupation. These atrocities were committed on the orders of a Baghdad cabal that had embarked on an illegal and revanchist attempt to redraw the map.

The prosecution's failure to indict the deposed dictator for imposing an unjust eight-year war on Iran that caused hundreds of thousands of deaths cannot be justified on any ground. Iraq's aggression against its eastern neighbour was as reprehensible as its invasion of Kuwait. In both the cases, Mr. Hussein launched his attacks without any provocation driven solely by his expansionist ambitions. While a United States-led international coalition provided the Kuwaitis with some redress by driving out the invaders

and forcing them to pay reparations — and in the process inflicted enormous suffering on the hard-pressed people of Iraq during the Gulf War and subsequently — the Iranians have not been recompensed for the suffering they endured. Poison gas was used against the defending army and bargages of Scud missiles were fired at Teheran and other cities in utter disregard for civilian lives. The prosecutors apparently took their cue from the U.S. administration, which wields real power in Iraq, when they declined to include the atrocities committed on Iran in the list of charges against Mr. Hussein. However, it was inexplicable that the prosecutors did not indict the Ba'athists for cruelly suppressing the broad mass of Iraqis and for making them suffer the consequences (such as the devastating economic sanctions imposed after the 1991 Gulf War) of the leadership's misadventures.

While Mr. Hussein and his cohorts have plenty to answer for, the criminal proceedings initiated against them in an illegal court in an unfree nation under U.S.-led military occupation represent a travesty of justice. The tribunal was established by a government that is not representative of the Iraqi people and instead is widely perceived as a puppet that serves Washington's interests. Lawyers hired by Mr. Hussein are likely to argue that their client is immune from punishment because his status as President of the country cannot be undermined by an illegitimate invasion. Technically the law to be applied in such cases will have no leg to stand on since the old constitution has been abrogated and the new one is yet to be adopted. With all the suffering that the Iraqis have undergone over the years, they deserve the chance to bring their oppressors to justice before independent and impartial tribunals that apply laws universally perceived to be legitimate and follow fair procedures. The proceedings initiated in a Baghdad courtroom fail shamefully and tragically to meet these criteria.

IRAQ / THEY WERE IN CHAINS DURING HEARING

Saddam Hussein's aides seek legal help

BAGHDAD, JULY 2. Eleven of Saddam Hussein's closest lieutenants followed their former leader into court yesterday, some with eyes glistening, some confused and scared, but all shrunken and apparently fearing their time was up.

While Mr. Hussein breathed defiance during his 25-minute hearing and left the room with a smirk, many of his former lieutenants showed respect for the judge, some addressing him politely and even expressing satisfaction to have had their day in court.

The 11 — including Ali Hassan al-Majid, better known as Chemical Ali; Tariq Aziz, former Foreign Minister, and Mr. Hussein's half brothers Watban and Barzan al-Tikriti — were taken one-by-one into court for quick 10-minute appearances.

Like Mr. Hussein, they were dressed in cheap suits and open-necked shirts, bought off the rack for them by an American warrant officer.

Some of them, like Mr. Aziz, remained chained around the waist during their hearing.

But unlike Mr. Hussein, they all signed the papers put before them by the judge, acknowledging their rights before the court, and most politely made requests for lawyers — not just Iraqi ones, but attorneys from Jordan or Egypt.

Abid Hamid Mahmoud al-Tikriti, Mr. Hussein's one-time secretary, even managed to raise a laugh — unintentionally. Asked who he would like to represent him, he replied Malik al-Hassan, who unknown to the defendant was recently appointed Iraq's Justice Minister.

When explained his rights, he said: "These rights are excellent," and when the judge told him who he was, he replied; "You're welcome, most welcome," according to a reporter assigned to cover the hearing for the press.

Chemical Ali, accused of some of the worst crimes during Mr. Hussein's regime, including the gassing of the Kurds in Halabja in 1988 and the suppression of a 1991 Shia and Kurd uprising, entered the courtroom using a stick, the

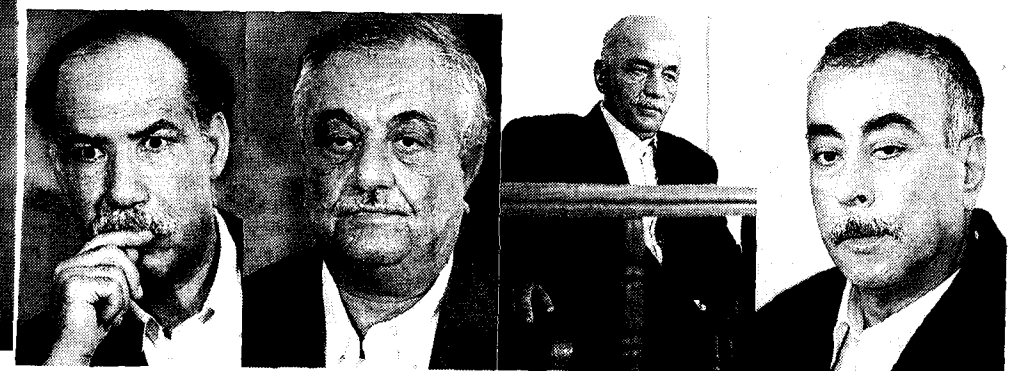
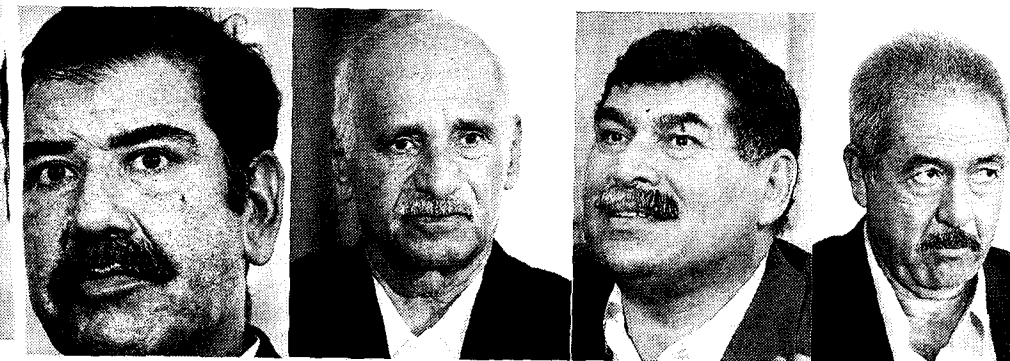
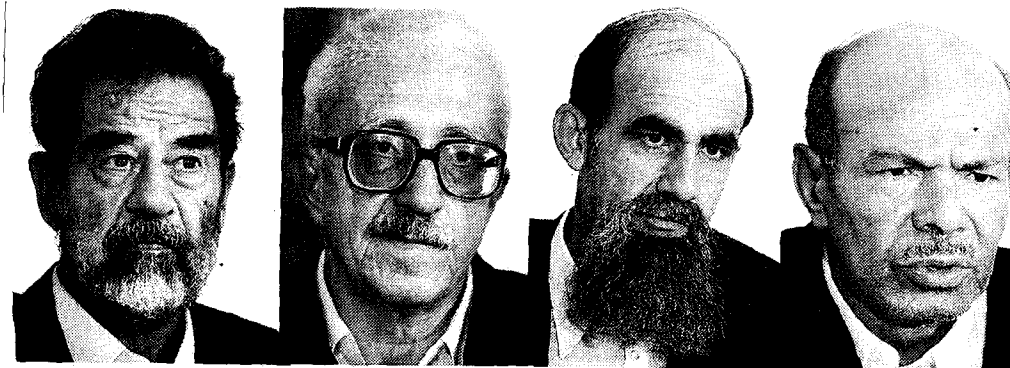
result of diabetes. According to a witness, he was sober and pensive during his hearing, but polite.

When read his rights, he replied: "Thank you," and when told what he was accused of, he said: "I'm happy with the accusations because I'm innocent of them."

When he left the courtroom, Mr. Ali told a guard he was pleased with how things had gone because, he said, he had expected the charges to be much worse, according to Mowaffaq al-Rubaie, Iraq's security adviser and observer.

The assigned reporter said many of the accused invoked God when addressing the judge, and via their words and intonations seemed to accept that justice was looming.

All were accused of broad crimes, such as murders during the 1990s, Halabja's gassing, or the suppression of the 1991 uprising, and were told they faced justice under Section 406/1/a of Iraq's criminal code, which carries the death penalty. — Reuters



Questions over neutrality of trial

By Rory McCarthy and Jonathan Steele

BAGHDAD, JULY 2. The complexities of preparing the case against Saddam Hussein became apparent within weeks of Iraq's special tribunal being set up at the end of last year.

Salem Chalabi, the U.S.-and-British-educated lawyer who runs the tribunal, spoke then of his frustrations at sifting through the evidence, finding competent, unbiased judges, securing jails and courtrooms and protecting witnesses. He warned it could take up to two years to bring Mr. Hussein to trial. Now a courthouse and judges have been found and the Iraqis have agreed to let the U.S. military continue to guard Mr. Hussein and the other detenus until the Iraqi security forces are up to the job.

But that still leaves several issues unsettled. Mr. Hussein's lawyers will challenge the legitimacy of the court, which was set up by the Governing Council, a now disbanded group of advisers appointed by the U.S. occupation authorities. The fact that the tribunal is being run by Mr. Chalabi, nephew of one of Iraq's

most vociferous opponents of Mr. Hussein, Ahmad Chalabi, will also raise questions over neutrality.

Amnesty International has said the terms of the special tribunal needed to be changed. The statute, it said, did not prevent arbitrary arrest or the torture of detenus to extract confessions. It also suggested there was a lack of expertise among Iraqi judges in tackling cases involving human rights and crimes against humanity. Other human rights groups have noted there is no requirement for proof beyond a reasonable doubt.

Both the U.S. and the new Iraqi leadership want to run the trial themselves and resisted any suggestion of creating an independent, internationally staffed war crimes tribunal like those working on the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda. That fits comfortably with Washington's reluctance to sign up to the International Criminal Court, but inevitably means a shortage of experience and the danger of vengeful justice.

The Iraqis and the Americans want a short trial and will make every effort to stop Mr. Hussein

turning his appearance into a political campaign. That approach will also have to be carefully crafted if they are to avoid running a kangaroo court. Though the occupation authorities banned the death penalty, Iraq's new political leaders have warned it may be reintroduced for special cases. Perhaps the biggest hurdle may be the logistics of amassing evidence. The process may be seriously slowed by sifting through thousands of unsorted documents to find the papers that definitively prove Mr. Hussein issued direct orders for the most heinous crimes of his regime.

Few would deny there is a longer term military imperative to conducting a trial that is seen by all sides as impeccably fair. Lieutenant General Thomas Metz, the second most senior military commander in Iraq, said it was important the trial did not "become a carnival and something that the insurgents of the Ba'athists or anybody can say wasn't proper. We have invested too much, we have come too far not to do those last couple of steps with Saddam correctly." — ©Guardian Newspapers Limited 2004

The former Iraqi President, Saddam Hussein (top left) and 11 former officials of his regime who appeared at a court hearing on the outskirts of Baghdad on Thursday. (Top row, from second left) The former Deputy Prime Minister, Tariq Aziz; the former Presidential Secretary, Abed Hamid Mahmud al-Tikriti; the former Ba'ath Party Regional Command Chairman responsible for West Baghdad, Aziz Saleh al-Numan; Mr. Hussein's half brother and former presidential adviser, Watban Ibrahim Hasan al-Tikriti; the member of the decision-making Revolutionary Command Council, Mohammed Hamza al-Zubaidi; the former Defence Minister, Sultan Hashim Ahmad al-Tal; the former presidential adviser, Ali Hassan al-Majid (known as Chemical Ali); the former presidential adviser and half brother, Barzan Ibrahim Hasan al-Tikriti; the former Military Intelligence Chief and Governor of Baghdad, Sabir Abdul Azizi al-Douri; the former Vice-President, Taha Yassin Ramadan; and the former Secretary of the Republican Guard, Kamal Mustafa Abdullah Sultan al-Tikriti. — AFP

3 JUL 2004

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J'Accuse...!

● *'This is all a theatre; the real criminal is Bush.'*

By Christine Hauser

Saddam Hussein defiantly faced an Iraqi judicial hearing today, where he was read seven preliminary charges that included the 1990 invasion of Kuwait, suppressing the Shiite uprising, and the gassing of the Kurds, according to a television pool report.

"I am Saddam Hussein, the President of Iraq," Mr. Hussein replied twice when he answered the judge, whose first question was to ask his name.

"This is all a theatre; the real criminal is Bush," Mr. Hussein said.

According to the report — by the CNN correspondent, Christiane Amanpour, who was present in the courtroom — Mr. Hussein was dressed in civilian clothes and wearing a neat beard. His handcuffs, and a chain around his waist, were removed before he appeared in front of the judge. Mr. Hussein, who was captured by coalition forces in December, rejected the charges against him, calling the court proceeding "theatre" and questioning its jurisdiction. The report said that he tried to interrupt the judge by using the word "please," and that he was reprimanded for his language when he defended the invasion of Kuwait.

The trial is expected to begin within months. On Wednesday, the new Iraqi government took legal custody of Mr. Hussein, after seven months of imprisonment, and 11 of his aides. But the United States retains physical custody of Mr. Hussein, and he remains under American guard.

No lawyers were present and Mr. Hussein refused to sign papers that he had been read his rights and that he understood what was going on. The judge said he would enter the acknowledgement himself. The proceedings took place under tight security. Mr. Hussein was brought to the location in an armoured bus in a convoy ac-



Former President Saddam Hussein challenges the judge in court at a U.S. military base near the Baghdad airport on Thursday. — AFP

companied by American Humvees and an ambulance. A member of the defence team, Tim Hughes, said the lawyers would argue that the trial cannot be fair. They would argue

Mr. Hussein has immunity from prosecution because he is still Iraq's President, overthrown by an "illegitimate invasion." Mr. Hussein was denied legal representation at

Thursday's appearance, Mr. Hughes said. Mr. Hussein's voice was weak and hoarse, the report said, and when he challenged the judge he jabbed his finger at him. Iraqi guards and

new members of the new Iraqi government were among those watching, riveted by his appearance. The preliminary charges read today would form the basis for the formal indictment, for

which the investigative procedure will now begin, the report said. Earlier statements have said Mr. Hussein would be charged with crimes against humanity: the killing and torture

of hundreds of thousands of Iraqis during his more than two decades in power. — *New York Times News Service*

Lawyers cry foul: Page 15

বুশই অপরাধী, আদালতে বললেন 'প্রেসিডেন্ট' সাদ্দাম

১ জুলাই: আনি সাদ্দাম হুসেইন, ইরাকের প্রেসিডেন্ট।

ইরাকের বিশেষ ট্রাইব্যুনালের বিচারপতি যখন ক্ষমতাচ্যুত প্রেসিডেন্টকে তাঁর পরিচয় দিতে বলেন, তখন এ ভাবেই আজ সাদ্দাম নিজের পরিচয় দিয়েছেন বিচারপতিকে। চার দিন আগে ইরাকের অন্তর্বর্তী সরকারের হাতে আমেরিকা ক্ষমতা তুলে দেওয়ার পর আজ ইরাকি আদালতেই শুরু হয়েছে প্রাক্তন প্রেসিডেন্টের বিচার। সাদ্দাম অবশ্য তাঁর স্বভাবোচিত ভঙ্গিতে এই বিচারকে 'অহসন' হিসাবে বর্ণনা করেছেন। তাঁর মাফ্ কথা, আমেরিকার প্রেসিডেন্ট জর্জ বুশই আসল অপরাধী।

কালই প্রথম আদালতে উপস্থিত করা হয় সাদ্দাম ও তাঁর ১১ জন সহযোগীকে। যাদের মধ্যে আছেন ইরাকের প্রাক্তন উপ-প্রধানমন্ত্রী তারিক আজিজ, পশ্চিমী দুনিয়ায় যিনি ছিলেন সাদ্দামের মুখপাত্র, 'কোমক্যাল আলি' নামে পরিচিত আলি হাসান আল মজিদ ও প্রাক্তন ভাইস প্রেসিডেন্ট তাহা ইয়াসিন রামাদিন। সে দিনই ইরাকের বিশেষ ট্রাইব্যুনালের প্রধান মার্কিন প্রশিক্ষিত আইনজীবী সালেম চালাবি জানিয়েছিলেন, অন্য সহযোগীদের সমস্ত মনে হলোও সাদ্দাম ছিলেন যথেষ্ট সপ্রতিভ।

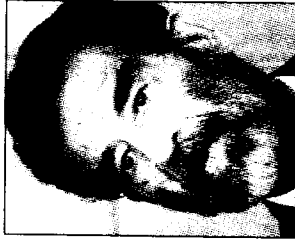
ইরাকি আদালতে বিচার শুরু হলোও সাদ্দাম এখনও মার্কিন হেফাজতে কড়া নিরাপত্তা বেষ্টনীতে রাখা হয়েছে। আজ সকালে মার্কিন সেনাবাহিনীর চারটি 'হামিড' গাড়ি এসকর্ট করে আদালতে নিয়ে আসে কালো সুট পরা সাদ্দামকে। খোদ সাদ্দাম তখন ছিলেন সাজোয়া গাড়ির ভিতরে। হাতকড়া আর আপাদমস্তক শৃঙ্খলে বাঁধা ছিলেন ইরাকের প্রাক্তন একাডেমিক। আদালতে ঢোকান পরে অবশ্য সাদ্দামের শৃঙ্খল খুলে দেওয়া হয়।

আজ প্রথম থেকেই আদালতে চূড়ান্ত অনমনীয় ভঙ্গিতে ছিলেন সাদ্দাম। প্রথমেই তিনি আদালতের কোনও কাগজে স্বাক্ষর করতে অস্বীকার করেন। নিজেকে এখনও ইরাকের প্রেসিডেন্ট হিসাবে বর্ণনা করে সাদ্দাম বুশ প্রশাসনকেই কাঠগড়ায় দাঁড় করান। বিচারপতি তাঁকে কুরেত যুদ্ধের প্রদর্শন নিয়ে প্রশ্ন করলে তিনি সরাসরি বলেন, "এক জন ইরাকি হয়ে কী ভাবে আপনি 'কুরেত আক্রমণ' বলছেন। কুরেত ইরাকেরই অংশ।" বিচারপতির সঙ্গে সাদ্দামের কথোপকথনের ছবি ইরাকি টেলিভিশনে দেখানো হয়েছে। তবে বিচার চলাকালীন সাদ্দাম বিচারপতিকে কী বলেছেন, তা মার্কিন প্রশাসনের নির্দেশে 'সেক্স' করে দেওয়া হয়েছে।

গত বছরের ডিসেম্বরে ডিকরিডে বন্দি হওয়ার পর থেকে সাদ্দামকে

জনসাধারণের সামনে আনা হয়নি। ইরাকিদের একটি বড় অংশের মধ্যে সাদ্দামের বিচার প্রক্রিয়াকে ঘিরে উৎসাহ লক্ষ্য করা গিয়েছে। অনেকেই স্বজন হারানোর দুঃখ সাদ্দামের প্রাণদণ্ডের মাধ্যমে তুলতে চাইছেন। সাদ্দামের শাসনকালে নিজের ভাই এবং স্বামীকে হারিয়েছিলেন জনৈক কান্তি হামাদি। তিনি বলছেন, ইরাকিদের হাতে তাঁর বিচার হওয়াটা অভিনব প্রস্তাব। এর ফলে তাঁর খুনে ইতিহাস সম্পর্কে সারা বিশ্বের মানুষ সম্যক ধারণা পাবে। তিনি বলেন, সাদ্দামের এমন শাস্তি হওয়া দরকার যা তাঁকে সত্যিই বিদ্ধ করবে।

সাদ্দাম ও তাঁর সহযোগীদের বিরুদ্ধে কী কী অভিযোগ খাড়া করা হয়েছে তা অক্ষয় এখনও সরকারি ভাবে জানানো হয়নি। তবে উপসাগরীয় যুদ্ধের পরে কুর্দ ও শিয়া অভ্যুত্থানে দমননীতি প্রয়োগ, কুরেত ও ইরান



সাদ্দাম: ক্ষমতায় যখন ছিলেন। ধরা পড়ার মুহূর্তে। আদালতের সামনে। — রয়টার্স

আক্রমণ, বিষাক্ত গ্যাস প্রয়োগ করে কুর্দদের বিরুদ্ধে গণহত্যার নির্দেশ, ইজরায়লের উপর স্ক্রাভ স্ক্রিপ্ট হামলা, এছাড়াও অসংখ্য মানুষের উপর অত্যাচারের অভিযোগ আনা হতে পারে সাদ্দামের বিরুদ্ধে।

১৯৯০ সালের অগস্ট মাসে কুরেতে সেনা পাঠিয়েছিলেন সাদ্দাম। যার পরিণতিতে '৯১-এর জানুয়ারিতে শুরু হয় প্রথম উপসাগরীয় যুদ্ধ। কুরেত ছেড়ে চলে আসার আগে ইরাকি সেনারা সেখানে অমানুষিক অত্যাচার চালিয়েছিলেন বলে অভিযোগ। কুরেতের রাজধানী কুরেত সিটিতে ব্যাপক লুণ্ঠন চালানো তারা, বহু বন্দিকে হত্যা করে, অনেককে বাগদাদে ধরেও নিয়ে যায়। এর পাশাপাশি, কুরেতের সাতশোর বেশি তেলের কুপে আশ্রণ

লাগিয়ে দিয়ে আসে ইরাকি সেনারা। পাইপ লাইন কেটে তেল ছড়িয়ে দৃষিত করে দেয় উপসাগর-সহ কুরেতের জলের উৎসগুলি। মার্কিন ছাড়া কুরেত ছেড়ে চলে আসার পরে দেশের শিয়াপন্থীদের উপরে ক্রুদ্ধ সাদ্দাম প্রতিশোধ নেন বলেও অভিযোগ। কুর্দরাও তাঁর রোষের মুখে পড়েন। রাসায়নিক গ্যাস প্রয়োগ করে হত্যা করা হয় কুর্দদেরও। ২০০১ সালে ইরাকের সাধারণ মানুষের উপরে যে ভাবে অত্যাচার ও নিপীড়ন চালানো হয়, তার নিদান করে রাষ্ট্রপুঞ্জের মানবাহিকার কমিশন।

মার্কিন সেনাদের হাতে ধরা পড়ার পর থেকে আজ পর্যন্ত সাদ্দাম এখনও নিজের পক্ষে কোনও আইনজীবী খাড়া করার দাবি জানাননি। তবে বর্তমানে জর্ডনের বাসিন্দা সাদ্দামের স্ত্রী সাজিদা ইরাকি আদালতে সাদ্দামের মামলা লড়ার জন্য ২০ জন আইনজীবীকে নিযুক্ত করেছেন। আইনজীবীদের এখনও পর্যন্ত মার্কিন সেনাবাহিনীর পক্ষ থেকে সাদ্দামের সঙ্গে দেখা করার অনুমতি দেওয়া হয়নি। সাদ্দামের দেখা না-পাওয়ায় তাঁরা আদালতের বৈধতা নিয়ে সরাসরি প্রশ্ন তুলেছেন। ইরাকের অন্তর্বর্তী সরকারের জাতীয় নিরাপত্তা উপদেষ্টা মোয়াকফ আল-কুবেই অলশা বলেছেন, "দেশের এবং দেশের বাইরে আর এবং বিশ্বের অন্য দেশের নাগরিকদের সামনে সাদ্দামের নিরপেক্ষ বিচারের প্রতিশ্রুতি দিলেও অনেকেই কিন্তু কুবেইয়ের এই কথার সঙ্গে এক মত হতে পারছেন না। ওয়াকিবহাল মতের ধারণা, দেশের ভিতরে গেরিলা হানায় জেরবার ইরাকের অন্তর্বর্তী সরকার সাদ্দামের বিচার প্রক্রিয়া পুরোদমে চালু করে তাদের সার্বভৌমত্ব প্রমাণ করতে উঠে পড়ে লেগেছে। মার্কিন বাহিনী ইরাক দখল করার পরে ইরাক থেকে মৃত্যুদণ্ড তুলে দেওয়া হয়েছিল। প্রধানমন্ত্রী ইয়াদ আল-উই ইতিমধ্যেই তা পুনরায় বলবৎ করার ইচ্ছা প্রকাশ করেছেন।

তবে নতুন করে আইন তৈরি করে ইরাক সরকার যতই অবস্থা সামাল দেওয়ার চেষ্টা করুক না কেন, ইরাকে গেরিলা হামলার ঘটনা কিন্তু কমেনি। আজই বাগদাদে সরকারের অর্থমন্ত্রকের দুই কর্মীকে গেরিলা হত্যা করেছে। মসুলে গেরিলা হামলায় জোটবাহিনীর এক সেনা মারা গিয়েছেন। তবে নিহত সেনা কোন দেশের, তা জানা যায়নি। ফলুজায় মার্কিন সেনারা জর্ডনের বাসিন্দা আল কায়দা জঙ্গি জারকোয়ইয়ের খোঁজে একটি বাড়িতে হামলা চালান। সেনা হামলায় ছ'জনের মৃত্যু হয়েছে।

— রয়টার্স

COURT APPEARANCE TODAY ■ GOVT REINSTATES DEATH PENALTY

Saddam in Iraqi custody

Associated Press

BAGHDAD, June 30. — The Iraqis took legal custody of Saddam Hussein and 11 of his top lieutenants today, a first step toward the ousted dictator's expected trial for crimes against humanity. In a one-line announcement, Prime Minister Mr Iyad Allawi's office said the Iraqi government assumed legal — but not physical — control today at 10.15 a.m.

They are to appear in court tomorrow for a reading of the charges. Mr Salem Chalabi, the director of the Special Tribunal that will conduct the trials, said he met Saddam "earlier today to explain his rights and what will happen".

Saddam, who appeared to have lost weight in confinement, said "Good morning" as he entered the room, according to Mr Chalabi. After being informed that he was being placed under Iraqi jurisdiction, Saddam was ordered "to leave the room".

In another development, justice minister Mr Malik



Two Iraqi boys play in front of a wall with defaced images of Saddam Hussein in Baghdad on Wednesday. — AFP

Dohan al-Hassan said the new government had approved a decree reinstating the death penalty, which

Saddam is no longer a prisoner of war — subject to rights under the Geneva Conventions — but a criminal defendant whose treatment will be in accordance with Iraqi law

was abolished by the US-led coalition, adds AFP. The minister told the newspaper *La Repubblica* "If there is evidence proving the most serious charges, the special court set up during the occupa-

tion will be able to sentence him to death..."

Saddam will remain in a US-controlled jail guarded by Americans until the Iraqis are ready to take physical custody of him. That is expected to take a long time. However, the legal transfer means that Saddam and the others are no longer prisoners of war — subject to rights under the Geneva Conventions — but criminal defendants whose treatment will be in accordance with Iraqi law. The change in status gives them the right to attorneys.

Mr Chalabi said earlier that the trials of Saddam and other senior figures likely would not begin before 2005.

The likely charges

The crimes against humanity for which Saddam is expected to be tried include the 1988 chemical weapons massacre of Kurds in Halabja, the slaughter of Shi'ites during a 1991 uprising in southern Iraq, the 1990 invasion of Kuwait, and the 1980-88 Iran-Iraq war.

US base attack injures 11

BAGHDAD, June 30. — Insurgents fired at least 10 mortar rounds at a US base on the outskirts of Baghdad on the outskirts of Baghdad International Airport today, wounding 11 soldiers, two of them seriously, and starting a fire that burned for well over an hour.

The base has been subject to almost daily mortar attacks, but this was the first time the attacks caused significant casualties and damage.

That attack, along with a car bomb that exploded outside a police headquarters in Samawah, were yet more evidence that insurgents have no plans of letting up their attacks even after the handover of sovereignty to the Iraqis.

Guerrillas struck the logistics base on the edge of Baghdad's airport at about 8:15 a.m. (local time), said Lt. Col Richard Rael, their commander. The base is operated by the New Mexico Army National Guard's 515 Corps Support Battalion. — AP

সাদ্দামের বিরুদ্ধে আজ চার্জ গঠন ইরাকে

বাগদাদ, ৩০ জুন: ইরাকের ক্ষমতাচ্যুত প্রেসিডেন্ট সাদ্দাম হুসেন এবং তাঁর ১১ জন সেনাধ্যক্ষের বিচারের দায়িত্ব আজ ইরাকের অন্তর্বর্তী সরকারের হাতে তুলে দিল মার্কিন সেনা। দু'দিন আগে আমেরিকার কাছ থেকে ক্ষমতা হাতে পাওয়ার পরেই ইরাক সরকারের পক্ষ থেকে এ খবর জানিয়ে দেওয়া হয়েছিল। সাদ্দাম-সহ ওই শীর্ষ নেতাদের বিচারের দায়িত্ব সরকারের হাতে তুলে দিলেও তারা মার্কিন সেনা হেফাজতেই বন্দি থাকবেন।

সাদ্দাম ছাড়াও উল্লেখযোগ্য যে সব শীর্ষ নেতার বিচারের ভার আজ ইরাকের হাতে তুলে দেওয়া হয়েছে, তাঁদের মধ্যে রয়েছেন সাদ্দামের শাসনকালে ইরাকের ডেপুটি প্রধানমন্ত্রী তারিক আজিজ, ভাইস প্রেসিডেন্ট তাহা ইয়াসিন রামাদান, প্রতিরক্ষামন্ত্রী সুলতান হাসিম আহমেদ আল-তাল, আলি হাসান আল-মজিদ ওরফে কেমিক্যাল আলি এবং সাদ্দামের সৎ ভাই ওয়াটবান ইব্রাহিম হাসান আল-তিকরিতি।

সরকারি ভাবে সাদ্দাম ও ১১ জন শীর্ষ নেতাকে ইরাকের হাতে তুলে দেওয়ার পরেই তাঁদের আদালতে হাজির করা হয়। ইরাকি স্পেশাল ট্রাইবুনালের ডিরেক্টর সালাম চালাবি বলেছেন, আদালতে এসেই সাদ্দাম উপস্থিত সবাইকে 'সুপ্রভাত' সম্বোধন করে বিচারপতির কাছে কয়েকটি প্রশ্ন করার আবেদন জানান। আদালত থেকে বেরিয়ে এসে চালাবি বলেন, সাদ্দামকে বেশ সুস্থ এবং সপ্রতিভ দেখলেও সাদ্দামের অধিকাংশ সহযোগীদের সন্ত্রস্ত মনে হচ্ছিল। ইরাকের প্রধানমন্ত্রী ইয়াদ আলাউইয়ের অফিস সূত্রে জানা গিয়েছে, কালই সাদ্দাম ও তাঁর সহযোগীদের বিরুদ্ধে চার্জ গঠন করা হবে। সরকারি সূত্রে জানা গিয়েছে, কুর্দ প্রদেশের মানুষদের গ্যাস চেম্বারে হত্যা, কুয়েত দখল, কুর্দ এবং শিয়া অভ্যুত্থান দমননীতি প্রয়োগ এবং ইরান-ইরাক যুদ্ধের উপরেই ওই নেতাদের বিরুদ্ধে চার্জ গঠন করা হবে।

ক্ষমতা হাতে পাওয়ার পরেই ইরাকের অন্তর্বর্তী সরকারের প্রেসিডেন্ট গাজি জাওয়ার দেশে নতুন নিরাপত্তা আইন প্রয়োগের প্রয়োজনীয়তার কথা বলেছেন। নতুন করে 'মৃত্যুদণ্ড' বলবৎ করার কথাও বলেছেন জাওয়ার। তবে ইরাকের হাতে ক্ষমতা ফেরার পরেও দেশে গেরিলা হামলার ঘটনা কিন্তু কমেনি। ইরাকের পবিত্র শহর নজাফে শিয়া নেতা মোকতাদা আল সদরের অনুগামী মাহদি সেনার সঙ্গে সংঘর্ষ বাধলে ওই অঞ্চলে কার্ফু জারি করেছে ইরাকি পুলিশ। তিন মাস আগে মার্কিন সেনার বিরুদ্ধে সশস্ত্র বিদ্রোহ ঘোষণা করে সদরের নেতৃত্বে মাহদি সেনারা। এ দিকে আজই গেরিলা বাগদাদের আন্তর্জাতিক বিমানবন্দরে মর্টার হামলায় ছ'জন মার্কিন সেনা জখম হয়েছেন। — রয়টার্স

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ANADABAZAR PATEIKA

West Asia

Bush, Chirac clash again over Turkey

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By Ian Black

ISTANBUL, JUNE 30. The U.S. President, George W Bush, and the French President, Jacques Chirac, yesterday clashed sharply for the second day running at NATO's Istanbul summit, squabbling over Iraq, Afghanistan and Turkey's place in Europe.

The French President undermined hopes of burying trans-Atlantic disagreements when he insisted he was "entirely hostile" to any NATO presence in Iraq, which he warned would be "dangerous and counterproductive."

Mr. Chirac was unapologetic about his repeated rows with the U.S. "We are friends and allies but we are not servants," he told reporters before leaving for an E.U. summit in Brussels.

"When we do not agree we do not say so aggressively, but in a firm manner." He also resisted U.S. pressure to deploy NATO units to boost security in Afghanistan. The U.S. Defence Secretary, Donald Rumsfeld, warned that opposition to deploying the NATO Response Force (NRF) could be circumvented by taking a decision in a forum which excludes France.

But Mr. Chirac, unhappy about deploying the alliance outside its Cold War-era European area of operations, made clear he thought the force should not be used to help secure the Afghan elections in September.

"The NRF is not designed for this. It should not be used just for any old matter." Mr. Bush again called on the E.U. to give Turkey a firm date for starting

membership talks — after being told by his French counterpart only the day before to mind his own business on this issue. Mr. Bush said that taking the world's most successful Muslim democracy into the E.U. would encourage other Islamic states to undertake the democratic reforms he hopes Iraq will see as the post-Saddam Government takes charge. "Including Turkey in the E.U. would prove that Europe is not the exclusive club of a single religion and it would expose the 'clash of civilisations' as a passing myth of history," he said.

The E.U. leaders are to decide this year whether Turkey meets stringent standards for democracy and human rights that will enable it to start membership talks next year. — ©Guardian Newspapers Limited 2004