

THURSDAY, JUNE 30, 2005

## Iran takes a turn to the right

**W**ith conservative candidate Mahmoud Ahmadinejad winning the presidential election in Iran, hardliners in the theocratic establishment control all levers of power in the country. Iranian reformers were left out of the race after their candidates fared poorly in the first round of voting on June 17. Left with little choice, they rallied behind the centrist Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani in the run-off election held on June 24. This was a last-ditch attempt to preserve at least a part of the gains the forces of democratic liberalism made over the past eight years. The effort to project Mr. Rafsanjani as a reformer failed to convince. He was unable to correct the widespread public perception that he was an integral part of a corrupt, oppressive establishment. The vote against Mr. Rafsanjani appears to have contributed substantially to his opponent's margin of victory. It is ironic that Mr. Ahmadinejad should be the beneficiary of this negative vote since he is in reality an establishment loyalist. He won acceptance as a man of the masses on account of his low-key lifestyle as much as the agenda he seeks to promote. There is no guarantee that he will abide by his promise not to reverse the modest advances towards political, social, and cultural liberalism made during the eight-year tenure of President Mohammed Khatami. Sections of the Iranian people, especially women and youth, supported these reforms. However, like the masses, they too desperately await change in other spheres as well. They want an end to the widespread unemployment, the high rate of inflation, and rampant corruption. A majority clearly bought into the President-elect's promise that he would apply himself to these tasks.

Right-wing ideologues, especially those in the ranks of the Revolutionary Guards and the Basij militia, will be inclined to support an agenda for reform in the spheres Mr. Ahmadinejad intends to focus on. However, these are the sections that have kept conservative clerics in power and looked to them for guidance. The monopoly the right wing of the clergy has exercised for years, while giving reformers limited space for a short period, is a major cause of rot in the system. The President-elect's promise of reform will not be taken seriously if he does not stand up to this powerful segment of his support base. Iran's foreign and national security policies are likely to remain largely unchanged since the elected government has only a limited say in these matters. The office of the Supreme Religious Leader is likely to continue with the hard-line approach on issues such as engagement with the West and the pursuit of a nuclear programme. There will be a difference once Mr. Ahmadinejad and his cabinet are sworn in. The Khatami Government did try to be a little flexible in its dealings with the West. Mr. Ahmadinejad as President will have his task cut out as he tries to deal with diverse, contradictory pressures.

30 JUN 2005

THE MINUTE

# Conservatives regain the Presidency in Iran

Atul Aneja

IRAN'S SLOW progression towards reforms, which promised to take off during the eight-year tenure of Mohammad Khatami, appears to have been stalled with the election of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad as the new President. More than an individual, Mr. Ahmadinejad represents a right-wing drift in a large section of the new generation, which has, for the moment, overpowered the impulse for reform as well as the aspirations of its liberal advocates.

He belongs to the younger generation of Iranians who emerged as a cohesive force during the eight-year Iran-Iraq war that began in 1980. Most Iranians see the war as an American attempt to throttle the Revolution using Iraq as a proxy. Those who fought in that war acquired a reputation for being defenders of the revolution.

The war brought Mr. Ahmadinejad in contact with the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) — the elite force he joined in 1986. During the conflict, he fought inside Iraq in an area around the oil rich city of Kirkuk, did intelligence work as well as other security duties. Apart from his strong connections with the IRGC, Mr. Ahmadinejad derives his clout from his proximity to the Basij — the pro-establishment vigilante group. Basiji cadres can easily be distinguished in public — most of them are bearded, they have a military bearing, and they travel on motorcycles.

## Rising force

Mr. Ahmadinejad was once an instructor for the Basij, which is closely associated with the IRGC. He is also a prominent member of the Abadgaran, the rising right-wing political force which has begun to challenge sections of the clerical old guard involved in bringing about the 1979 revolution. The Abadgaran rose to prominence when it won the Teheran municipal council elections. In April 2003, it positioned Mr.

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Ahmadinejad as the city mayor. It next swept the February 2004 parliamentary polls, displacing the reformers who had dominated Parliament during the Khatami years. The Presidency was the last bastion, which it overwhelmed on June 24, when Mr. Ahmadinejad was elected to the high office. The ninth Presidential elections therefore symbolise the emergence of a new generation leadership, which has systematically established its hold over all key institutions of government. Mr. Ahmadinejad has emerged as a prominent player in the intergenerational power shift in Iran.

The Abadgaran's rise appears to have been aided by the hardline Guardians Council, either through direct interference or by default. This powerful institution has three clerics appointed by Iran's supreme leader to check whether a law passed by Parliament is in line with the principles of Shia Islam. It also has three lawyers appointed by the head of the judiciary, who in turn is a supreme leader appointee. The Guardians Council is also responsible for elections, and it barred a large number of established reformers from contesting the parliamentary polls. It attracted attention during the ninth presidential elections when Mehdi Karroubi, who narrowly lost to Mr. Ahmadinejad in the first round of polling, accused it of wrongful interference. The Council has strongly denied these charges.

The Presidential elections have also exposed the prominent class divisions in Iranian society.

With 70 per cent of Iranians below the age of 30, all the Presidential candidates tried to woo the new generation voters. But, unlike the rest, Mr. Ahmadinejad focussed on winning the hearts and minds of the unemployed and underprivileged youth. In a June 8 television interview, he called for the creation of a Young People's fund, where one per cent of the state budget would be deposited. In another interview, his representative took a swipe at the rise of the wealthy in post-revolution Iran, by comparing them with the aristocracy comprising "thousand families" that ruled the country during the days of the monarchy. Mr. Ahmadinejad has also stressed upon land redistribution, state control over natural resources, support for small workshops, and better wages for public servants.

## 'Man of the people'

During the campaign, Mr. Ahmadinejad projected his "humble origins" and a spartan lifestyle in order to be seen as the "man of the people." In contrast, Ali Akbar Rafsanjani, aggressively used television to make his case, depending greatly on slick commercials. These might have appealed to the well-heeled in up-market north Teheran, but may not have cut much ice with the unemployed in the southern and eastern areas.

In a conversation with a panel of young people on TV, Mr. Rafsanjani was asked whether people should be allowed to choose the clothes they

wear — a reference to the dress code imposed on women in Iran after the Revolution. "Design and colour depends on people's taste... There should at least be clothes — no nudity," he joked. The turbaned cleric then answered questions on freedom, relations between the sexes, love and death. His campaign team that consisted of many young boys and girls distributed compact discs of his interview.

After decades in public life, which saw him twice holding the position of President, Speaker of Parliament, head of the powerful Expediency Council and adviser to the supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, Mr. Rafsanjani has emerged as a spent force and one who was unable to reinvent himself as a moderniser, in step with the hopes and aspirations of the youth. His wealth from a thriving family business, the powers of patronage acquired through the powerful political positions he held and from the informal influence of his extended family were, in the end, not enough.

## Shaky foundations

That Mr. Rafsanjani was campaigning on shaky foundations became apparent when influential sections of the clergy began to desert him. For instance, the religious seminary in Qom reportedly failed to support Mr. Rafsanjani. Thirty-two out of 55 people at a meeting meant to decide on supporting a presidential candidate voted for him, but three more votes were required for an endorsement. There have been reports in the Persian press that the lecturers in the seminary issued a statement in late May, which accused Mr. Rafsanjani of disregarding existing laws during his Presidency, and for promoting economic development at the expense of social justice. This led to "social divisions, favouritism, poverty, and corruption." The seminarians noted that Mr. Rafsanjani believes "it is logical and legal to have social cleavages in society — even among statesmen."

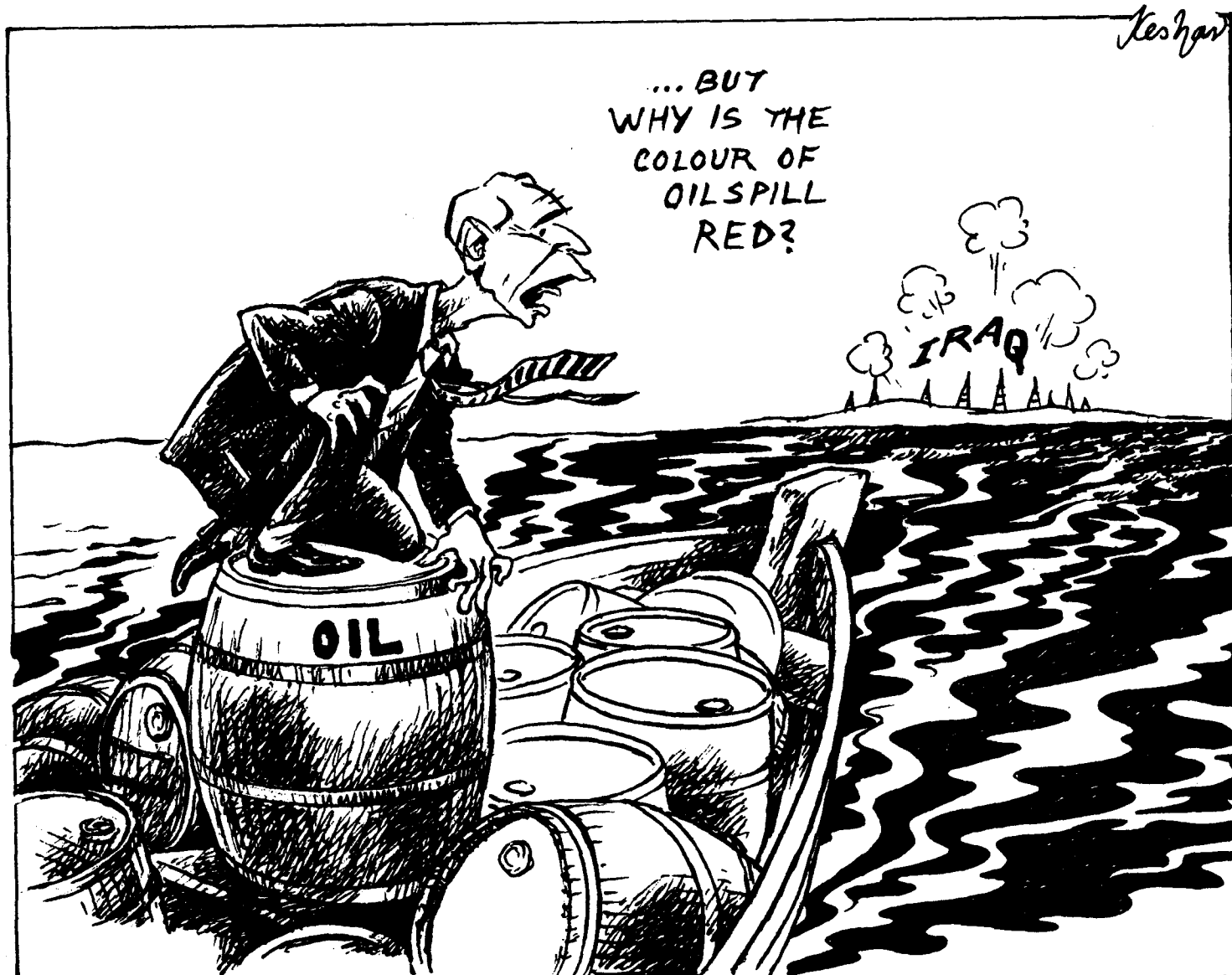
The conservative Teheran Militant Clergy Association supported Mr. Rafsanjani's candidature only reluctantly. This was because the Coordination Council of Islamic Revolution Forces, with which the Association is linked, chose Ali Larijani as its candidate.

The hardline Ansar-I-Hizbullah, also declared its reservations about Mr. Rafsanjani. Mujtaba Keshani, a leading cleric who serves on its central council, said that corrupt elements were part of Mr. Rafsanjani's camp. Mr. Keshani also reportedly compared Mr. Rafsanjani's privatisation plans with the thousand affluent families that set the political agenda during the monarchical era. He was also criticised for his campaign photographs with young girls who, in Mr. Keshani's view, were not wearing their Islamic head coverings correctly.

Part of the trading community organised under the Bazaar and Guilds of Teheran did not back Mr. Rafsanjani preferring Mr. Larijani instead. As Mr. Ahmadinejad prepares to take office in August, his foreign policy is likely to attract the maximum possible scrutiny abroad. He has already spelt out the broad contours of his approach to foreign affairs, though these might undergo a modification once professional diplomats get into the act. In an interview broadcast on June 8, Mr. Ahmadinejad said he wished to promote relations with all countries "on the basis of respect." In terms of priorities, neighbouring countries would receive his greatest attention followed by those states, which were once a part of the Persian Empire. Relations with Muslim states were important but so were with countries not hostile to Iran.

Mr. Ahmadinejad appears firm on developing nuclear energy. He has said that Iran has the right to develop nuclear energy and, "no one can deprive the Iranian nation of this right." Relations with the United States, in his view, were not the top-most priority. On his website he has stated that "America's unilateral move to sever its ties with the Islamic Republic was aimed at destroying the Islamic Revolution." The U.S., he added, was seeking to re-engage Iran only with this aim in mind. Mr. Ahmadinejad observed that Iran, should consider resuming its ties with Washington only after carefully evaluating its national interests.

## CARTOONSCAPE



29 JUN 2003

# 'Jury of Conscience' indicts U.S., U.K. on Iraq

## The Jury has called for the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of the coalition forces from the West Asian country.

W. R. G. N. 10.11.29/6

**"THE ATTACK** on Iraq is an attack on justice, on liberty, on our safety, on our future, on us all" — The Jury of Conscience, set up by the World Tribunal on Iraq (WTI), meeting in Istanbul between June 24 and 27.

A press release by WTI, "a worldwide undertaking to reclaim justice," said the Jury, drawn from 10 different countries, heard testimonies from 54 members of the panel of advocates who came from across the world, including Iraq, the United States, and the United Kingdom. This global civil initiative came to an end with a press conference at which the Jury's conclusions were announced by its chairperson, writer Arundhati Roy.

The Jury of Conscience defined this war as one of the most unjust in history. "The Bush and Blair administrations blatantly ignored the massive opposition to the war expressed by millions of people around the world. They embarked upon one of the most unjust, immoral, and cowardly wars in history. The Anglo-American occupation of Iraq of the last 27 months has led to the destruction and devastation of the Iraqi state and society. Law and order have broken down completely, resulting in a pervasive lack of human security; the physical infrastructure is in shambles; the health care delivery system is a mess; the education

system has ceased to function; there is massive environmental and ecological devastation; and, the cultural and archaeological heritage of the Iraqi people has been desecrated."

On the basis of these findings and recalling the Charter of the United Nations and other legal documents, the jury has established the following charges against the Governments of the U.S. and the U.K.:

- Planning, preparing, and waging the supreme crime of a war of aggression in contravention of the United Nations Charter and the Nuremberg Principles.
- Targeting the civilian population of Iraq and civilian infrastructure.
- Using disproportionate force and indiscriminate weapon systems.
- Failing to safeguard the lives of civilians during military activities and during the occupation period thereafter.
- Using deadly violence against peaceful protesters.
- Imposing punishments without charge or trial, including collective punishment.
- Subjecting Iraqi soldiers and civilians to torture and cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment.
- Re-writing the laws of a country that has been illegally invaded and occupied.
- Wilfully devastating the environment.
- Actively creating conditions under which

the status of Iraqi women has seriously been degraded.

- Failing to protect humanity's rich archaeological and cultural heritage in Iraq.
- Obstructing the right to information, including the censoring of Iraqi media.
- Redefining torture in violation of international law, to allow use of torture and illegal detentions.

The Jury of Conscience also established charges against the Security Council of the United Nations for failing to stop war crimes and crimes against humanity among other failures; against the Governments of the Coalition of the Willing for collaborating in the invasion and occupation of Iraq; against the governments of other countries for allowing the use of military bases and air space and providing other logistical support; against private corporations for profiting from the war; against the major corporate media for disseminating deliberate falsehoods and failing to report atrocities.

The Jury also provided a number of recommendations that include recognising the right of the Iraqi people to resist the illegal occupation of their country and to develop independent institutions, and affirming that the right to resist the occupation is the right to wage a struggle for self-determination, freedom, and independence as derived from

the Charter of the United Nations, we the Jury of Conscience declare our solidarity with the people of Iraq and call for the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of the coalition forces from Iraq.

The Istanbul session of the WTI lasted three days and presented testimony on the illegality and criminal violations in the U.S. pretexts for and conduct of this war. The expert opinion, witness testimony, video and image evidence addressed the impact of war on civilians, the torture of prisoners, the unlawful imprisonment of Iraqis without charges or legal defence, the use of depleted uranium weapons, the effects of the war on Iraq's infrastructure, the destruction of Iraqi cultural institutions, and the liability of the invaders in international law for failing to protect these treasures of humanity.

The session in Istanbul was the culminating session of commissions of inquiry and hearings held around the world over the past two years. Sessions on different topics related to the war on Iraq were held in London, Mumbai, Copenhagen, Brussels, New York, Japan, Stockholm, South Korea, Rome, Frankfurt, Geneva, Lisbon and Spain. They have compiled a definitive historical record of evidence on the illegality of the invasion and occupation that will be recorded in a forthcoming book. (WTI Press Release)

THE HINDU

# Iran President vows to restart N-programme

Tehran, June 27

THE PRESIDENT-ELECT of Iran vowed to restart the nation's controversial nuclear programme, saying it was meant only for peaceful energy purposes. The US defence secretary, Donald Rumsfeld, labelled the new ultraconservative leader as "no friend of democracy."

Asked about relations with the US during his first news conference since Friday's election, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad said on Sunday that Iran "is taking the path of progress based on self-reliance. It doesn't need the US significantly on this path."

In a sign of tensions likely ahead, Rumsfeld dismissed the vote as a "mock election."

Ahmadinejad entered the crowded chambers in Iran's municipal building with little fanfare, maintaining the unassuming style embraced by the roughly 17 million Iranians who voted him to power in a landslide victory.

His government's foreign policy would focus on "peace, moderation and coexistence," he said. "Moderation will be the policy of (my) popular government. Extremism will have no place in (my) popular government," he said.

He fielded questions confidently and smiled broadly when asked by an Iranian female journalist wearing a colourful headscarf whether he would introduce a strict dress code. It wasn't his job to decide, he said.

"I am the President. There are

people who make those decisions," Ahmadinejad said. He appeared to be referring to the judiciary and the police, which enforce the law on the dress code. In his opening statement, he promised to shun extremism and cobble together a moderate regime. Yet critics say his election only consolidated the hardliners' hold on power, and no reform-minded people remain in the government.

"He is no friend of democracy," Rumsfeld said on Fox News Sunday. "He is a person who is

very much supportive of the current ayatollahs, who are telling the people of that country how to live their lives, and my guess is over time the young people and women will find him as well as his masters unacceptable."

A key concern for the United States is Iran's 20-year-old nuclear program, revealed in 2002. The United States alleges the program is aimed at building atomic weapons.

Iran insists it is only interested in generating electricity. Uranium enriched to low levels has energy uses, while highly enriched uranium can be used in bombs.

Iran suspended all uranium enrichment-related activities in November to avoid possible sanctions from the UN Security Council. "We need the peaceful nuclear technology for energy, medical and agricultural purposes and our scientific progress. We will continue this," said Ahmadinejad. He said Iran's decision would not change, but did not say when the resumption would begin.

Agenci



Mahmoud Ahmadinejad

## Pendulum Swings

In Iran, Ahmadinejad's surprise triumph rewrites equations

THE pendulum has swung once again in Iran. When Mohammed Khatami swept to power in the elections of 1997 he embodied the aspirations of Iranians hoping for reform of the country's theocracy. Today, the reformists have been thrown out of almost all positions of power, with dark horse Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, Teheran's former hardline mayor, completing the process by triumphing over reformist-backed presidential candidate Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani. Ahmadinejad's victory will have international repercussions. One view is that Iran's foreign or nuclear policies are decided by "consensus", meaning the clerical establishment presided over by Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. This is true only up to a point, as even the clerics are wont to use elections as a weather vane. They will, in all likelihood, read Ahmadinejad's victory as a signal of support for a hard stance on international issues. It means that resolving the standoff on Iran's nuclear programme just got a little more difficult.

Khatami made promises but could not stand by the reformists, which led to widespread public doubts about whether he could deliver. Subsequently, reformists entered into an alliance with Rafsanjani whose sympathy for their ideals was opportunistic, and who had a reputation for corruption. The alliance was unconvincing and didn't work at the hustings. While reformists spoke of political reform and social liberalisation their Achilles heel turned out to be the economy, which has been stagnating for a considerable period. As in many oil-rich countries the benefits don't trickle down to the poor, and Ahmadinejad benefited from anti-incumbency sentiment. President Bush's pressure on Iran on the nuclear issue, as well as invasion of neighbouring Iraq, may also have been on voters' minds. Iranians are proudly nationalistic and may reject being seen as part of an axis of evil, or foregoing the nuclear option. Nevertheless Iranian youth is significantly more westernised than even before, and it is doubtful whether a return to the past is possible. Ahmadinejad's government will, in the end, have to meet the same tests as Khatami's.

## কটরপন্থায় ইরান

এশিয়ার পশ্চিম প্রান্তে ঘন পিঙ্গল মেঘের ঘনঘটা, এখনই এমন একটি ভবিষ্যদ্বাণী করা সমীচীন নহে, কিন্তু ইরানের সাধারণ নির্বাচনে কটরপন্থীদের জয় রাজনৈতিক বিশেষজ্ঞদের নূতন করিয়া ভাবাইয়া তুলিয়াছে। তেহরানের গোঁড়া রক্ষণশীল মেয়র মাহমুদ আহমাদিনেজাদ প্রেসিডেন্ট পদে বসিতে চলিয়াছেন, তিনি আকবর হাসমি রফসানজানির ন্যায় শক্তিদ্র প্রতিদ্বন্দ্বীকে ধরাশায়ী করিয়াছেন। ইরানের অভ্যন্তরে সংস্কারপন্থী বিভিন্ন দল এবং দেশের বিত্তবান অংশ রফসানজানিকে সমর্থন করিয়াছিল। রফসানজানি হারিলে দেশের ক্ষমতা মোল্লাতন্ত্রের হস্তে চলিয়া যাইবে, মূলত এই শঙ্কা হইতেই দেশের সচ্ছল জনগোষ্ঠী সংস্কারের পক্ষে দাঁড়াইয়াছিল। অতঃপর রফসানজানির পরাজয়ের পরে ইহা বলাই চলে যে বিদায়ী প্রেসিডেন্ট মহম্মদ খাতামির নেতৃত্বে যে সংস্কারকর্ম ইরানে ধীরে হইলেও চলিতেছিল, এক্ষণে তাহা হয়তো হিমঘরে নিষ্ক্রিপ্ত হইবে। প্রথম বেতার-ভাষণে ভাবী প্রেসিডেন্ট বলিয়াও দিয়াছেন, তাহার প্রথম কর্ম হইবে একটি উন্নত, ক্ষমতাস্বত্ব ইসলামি রাষ্ট্র গঠন। পাশাপাশি, আহমাদিনেজাদের জয়ের ফলে ইরান-আমেরিকা সাম্প্রতিক তিক্ত সম্পর্ক স্বাভাবিক করিয়া তুলিবার প্রক্রিয়াটি যে প্রবল ভাবে বাধাপ্রাপ্ত হইবে, তাহাও ঘটনা। উল্লেখ্য, রফসানজানি তাহার নির্বাচনী প্রচারে মার্কিন যুক্তরাষ্ট্রের সহিত উন্নততর সম্পর্কের লক্ষ্যে আগাইবার কথা বলিয়াছিলেন।

১৯৮০ সালে ইরানের সহিত সম্পর্ক ছিন্ন করিবার সময় হইতে এখনও পর্যন্ত ইরান-মার্কিন সম্পর্কে উন্নতির লক্ষণ নাই। মার্কিন প্রেসিডেন্ট জর্জ ডবলিউ বুশ বর্ণিত 'শয়তানের অক্ষ'র অন্যতম ইরান। ইরান পরমাণু অস্ত্র বানাইতেছে এবং সন্ত্রাসবাদে মদত দিতেছে, এই অভিযোগ লইয়া ওয়াশিংটন এই মুহূর্তে সরব। ইরাকে সম্প্রতি মার্কিন নেতৃত্বাধীন মিত্রশক্তি বাহিনী যে ধরনের আক্রমণ চালাইয়াছে, সেই উগ্রতার প্রেক্ষিতে প্রতিবেশী রাষ্ট্র ইরানে গোঁড়া ধর্মীয় পুনর্জাগরণ বিস্ময়কর নয়। সেই পুনর্জাগরণের বশে ক্ষমতায় আসিয়া প্রত্যাশিত ভাবেই ভাবী নূতন প্রেসিডেন্ট বলিয়াছেন, ইরানের প্রগতির ক্ষেত্রে আমেরিকার সহিত সুসম্পর্ক রহিল কি না, তাহা বড় কথা নহে। লক্ষণীয়, তিনি ইউরোপীয় ইউনিয়নের সহিত পরমাণু কার্যক্রম-সংক্রান্ত কথাবার্তার পথ বন্ধ করিতে চাহেন নাই, কিন্তু পাশাপাশি ইহাও বলিয়াছেন যে, শক্তি এবং স্বাস্থ্য পরিষেবার উন্নতির তাগিদেই দেশের পরমাণু কার্যক্রম চলিবে। উদ্দেশ্য যাহাই হউক, পরমাণু কর্মসূচিতে যে আশু স্থগিতকরণের কোনও সম্ভাবনা নাই, তাহা বিশেষজ্ঞেরা বলিয়াই দিয়াছেন। ইরানের প্রেসিডেন্ট ধর্মীয় নেতা না হইলেও যথেষ্ট কটরপন্থী। দ্বিতীয়ত, দেশের সর্বোচ্চ ধর্মীয় নেতা আয়াতোল্লা আলি খামেনেইয়ের অঙ্গুলিহেলনেই দেশের নীতি নির্ধারণের কাজটি অনেকাংশে প্রভাবিত হইবে। এই মুহূর্তে দেশের গরিষ্ঠ জনতার যা মনোভঙ্গি, তাহাতে উদারনৈতিক সংস্কারের পথে যাইবার সম্ভাবনা নাই বলিলেই চলে। আমেরিকা বলিয়াছিল, ইরানের নব্য জনগোষ্ঠীর নিকট আহমাদিনেজাদ গ্রহণযোগ্য হইবেন না। কিন্তু, নির্বাচনের ফল বাহির হইবার পরে দেখা গিয়াছে, দেশের বিভিন্ন অঞ্চলে নবীনগণ নূতন নেতার ছবি লইয়া উৎসবে মস্ত। আর, বৃহৎ সংখ্যাগরিষ্ঠতায় জিতিয়া যে নেতা ক্ষমতায় আসিয়াছেন, তাহার পিছনে নবীনদের সমর্থন নাই, তাহাও যুক্তিসঙ্গত বলিয়া মনে হয় না। আফগানিস্তানে ইসলামি মৌলবাদ ফের মাথা চাড়া দিয়াছে। ইরাকে মার্কিন-বিরোধী হিংসাত্মক কার্যকলাপ ক্রমবর্ধমান। ইরানের সাম্প্রতিক অবস্থার ইঙ্গিত, সেই দেশেও মার্কিন-বিরোধী শক্তি আপাতত সক্রিয় থাকিবে। যুদ্ধদীর্ণ পশ্চিম এশিয়া গোঁড়া ইসলামি মৌলবাদের পথেই হয়তো এক প্রকার নিরাপত্তা খুঁজিবে। তাহাই প্রধান উদ্বেগের বিষয়।

# 'Govt of moderation in Iran'

REUTERS

TEHRAN, JUNE 26

IRANIAN President-elect Mahmoud Ahmadinejad said on Sunday that his government would be one of "peace and moderation", while insisting his country would continue to develop nuclear technology.

"No extremism will be acceptable in popular government," he said in his first news conference since he beat moderate cleric Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani in Friday's Presidential election.

Ahmadinejad said Iran needed atomic technology to generate electricity and would continue nuclear talks with the European Union based on preserving its national interest.

The United States accuses Iran of seeking to build a nuclear bomb. "We need this technology for energy and medical purposes. We shall carry on with it," Ahmadinejad said. Asked about talks between the European Union and Iran over its nuclear programme, he said: "With preserving national interests and by emphasising the right of the Iranian nation for using peaceful nuclear technology, we will continue the talks."

On ties with the US, he said: "Our nation is continuing the path of progress and on this path has no significant need for (relations with) the United States."

Iran's conservative press hailed Ahmadinejad on Sunday as a man who could take on the United States and uphold the moral principles of



Iran's President-elect Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (C) pays his respects at the grave of late president Mohammad Ali Rejai, near Tehran on Sunday. Reuters

the Islamic revolution.

Major policy decisions on the nuclear programme, which Tehran denies is a ploy to get atomic weapons, are ultimately taken by Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

Ahmadinejad (48) has called for the nation to unite behind him in a spirit of solidarity, saying: "We have to forget all our rivalries and turn them into friendships." Major policy decisions on the nuclear programme, are ultimately taken by Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

Foreign Ministry Spokesman Hamid Reza Asefi said a new President would not

be able to strike a harder line independently in nuclear negotiations with the EU. The EU reacted warily to Ahmadinejad, who takes office in August. "From the new President Ahmadinejad we are waiting for clear words on human rights and the nuclear issue. But if the replies are negative, the European Union will have no choice but to freeze dialogue with Iran," European commissioner Franco Frattini told Italy's *La Repubblica* daily.

Reformists admitted they had only themselves to blame for Ahmadinejad's win as they had achieved so little in eight years of President Mohammad Khatami's government.

## Iran-N. Korea cruise missile link has Japan worried: Report

REUTERS

TOKYO, JUNE 26

JAPAN is worried that technology for a long-range cruise missile that can carry nuclear warheads may have been leaked to North Korea from Iran, a Japanese daily said on Sunday.

At issue is technology used in cruise missiles known as Kh-55s that Ukraine exported to Iran in 2001 under former Ukrainian President Leonid Kuchma, the *Sankei Shimbun* daily said, quoting Japanese government and ruling party sources.

"They are linked by a network beneath the surface regarding the development of weapons of mass destruction," *Sankei* quoted a Defence Ministry source as saying about Iran and North Korea.

The possible leak of technology was conveyed to Japan by a US intelligence agency, said *Sankei*, a conservative daily.

Developed in the late 1970s in the former Soviet Union, the Kh-55s have a range of 3,000 km, long enough to hit any part of Japan if deployed by North Korea, *Sankei* said.

27 JUN 2005

INDIAN EXPRESS

# Hardliner elected Iran President

Ayatollah Khamenei describes the polls as a "profound humiliation" for the U.S.

Atul Aneja

**MANAMA:** Former Teheran Mayor Mahmoud Ahmadinejad has been elected Iran's President, capping a process that has already resulted in a new generation of radical Iranian leaders taking over Parliament and several local bodies.

Iran's Interior Ministry declared Mr. Ahmadinejad as the winner in the ninth presidential elections after he registered a landslide victory against veteran politician and cleric Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani in the run-off polls held on Friday.

Iranian state television reported that Mr. Ahmadinejad had won 62 per cent of the 27.9 million votes cast, defying pre-election forecasts of a tight race. The turnout for the polls was around 60 per cent, a three per cent drop from polling in the first round on June 17.

## Call for unity

In a radio broadcast soon after he was named winner, Mr. Ahmadinejad called for unity, but did not make any policy remarks. "Today is a day when we have to forget all our rivalries and turn them into friendships." Iran, he said was "one nation and one big family. We should help each other to make a great society."

Mr. Ahmadinejad's election to the Presidency marks the growing influence of a new generation of young radicals who emerged as a cohesive unit during the eight-year Iran-Iraq war in the eighties. The new President is part of the Abadgaran group that swept Parliament in the February 2004 polls, after establishing its hold over the Teheran municipal council. The group chose Mr. Ahmadinejad as the Teheran Mayor in April



**DEFYING PROJECTIONS:** Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (right), who was elected Iranian President, with Speaker of Parliament Gholamali Haddad Adel in Teheran on Saturday. - PHOTO: AP

2003. Mr. Ahmadinejad is also close to the powerful Islamic Revolution Devotees' Society, as well as the Islamic Revolutionary Guards — the elite troops which he joined in 1986.

Mr. Ahmadinejad is believed to have polled heavily among the rural and urban poor. During his campaign he had proposed the creation of an employment fund made of one per cent of the state budget — a move that targeted

the underprivileged youth. One of his representatives in a television programme equated the wealthy post-revolutionary leaders to the 1,000 families of aristocrats that ruled Iran during the days of the monarchy.

## Poll fraud denied

Analysts point out that Mr. Rafsanjani's campaign appealed mostly to the young urban elite. The clerical support base was al-

so not unified behind him, as the influential seminary in Qom failed in late May to endorse his candidature. "Mr. Rafsanjani has been known commodity for years and his attempt to reinvent himself as a moderniser in step with the youth was simply not convincing", Amir Ali Nourbakhsh, an Iranian political analyst told *The Hindu*.

Meanwhile, the Guardian Council, which ran the poll, has

dismissed allegations of election fraud, after the Interior Ministry said it had received a spate of complaints of voting irregularities. Mr. Ahmadinejad will assume office in August and will be Iran's first non-cleric President in 24 years. Iran's supreme spiritual leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei banned street celebrations and described the election as a "profound humiliation" for the United States.



# Hardliner calls for unity

AGENCIES  
TEHRAN | JUNE 25

**U**LTRA-conservative Tehran mayor Mahmoud Ahmadinejad called for Iranians to put aside their differences moments after he swept to a surprise landslide win in the presidential elections on Saturday. "Today is a day when we have to forget all our rivalries and turn them into friendships," he said in his first broadcast on state radio after being elected.

Ahmadinejad (48) won the backing of the religious poor to defeat moderate cleric and political heavyweight Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, who was supported by pro-reform parties and wealthy Iranians fearful of a hardline monopoly on power in the Islamic state. Ahmadinejad will be Iran's first non-cleric President for 24 years when he takes office in August.

Official election results show Ahmadinejad comfortably defeated Rafsanjani, securing some 62 per cent of



**Former member of the special forces of Iran's hardline Revolutionary Guards, Tehran Mayor had campaigned for right to develop N-technology**

madinejad. The Interior Ministry also complained of illegal election-day campaigning.

Friday's vote exposed deep class divisions in the nation of 67 million. Ahmadinejad's victory was the latest by a new breed of hardline politicians, many of them former Revolutionary Guardsmen, who won local council and parliamentary elections in 2003 and 2004 amid widespread disillusionment with the slow pace of reform.

A former member of the special forces of Iran's Revolutionary Guards, Ahmadinejad, with his humble lifestyle and pledges to tackle corrup-

tion and redistribute oil wealth appealed to urban and rural religious poor.

Rafsanjani voters had said they feared Ahmadinejad would reverse the modest reforms made under Khatami that allow women to dress in brighter, skimpier clothes and couples to fraternise in public without fear of arrest.

Although Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei has the last word on all matters of state, a hardline presidency removes the moderating influence on decision-making exercised by outgoing reformist President Mohammad Khatami since 1997. "This all but closes the door for a breakthrough in US-Iran relations," said Karim Sadjadpour, Tehran-based analyst for the International Crisis Group.

In a campaign where candidates advocated better ties with the US, Ahmadinejad said relations with Washington were not a cure for Iran's ills. He also said Iran had a right to develop nuclear technology and that it was the people's demand.

JUN 2005

INDIAN EXPRESS

# Huge voter turnout in Iranian runoff poll

High-stakes presidential election exposes ideological and class divisions

Atul Aneja

**MANAMA:** Iranians have flocked to polling booths to choose a President in a polarised election where the pro-reform forces are pitted against a young generation of conservatives and their allies who are seeking to control all key government institutions.

The turnout for the high-stakes poll has been high, as long queues of voters were visible across polling stations. An opinion poll by the Iranian Students' News Agency (ISNA), taken on the eve of the election, predicted a 60 per cent turnout. Both the candidates — the 70-year old veteran Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani and the ultraconservative former Mayor of Teheran, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad — are running neck and neck according to this poll.

Analysts caution against the accuracy of opinion polls especially after the unexpected emergence of Mr. Ahmadinejad as the challenger to Mr. Rafsanjani — frontrunner during the first round on June 17. High polling has also been reported from Mashad, second largest city and Isfahan, where one of the candidates reported voting irregularities in the first round.

Voting in the 41,071 stations is scheduled to end at 7 p.m. local time but could be extended until midnight by order of the Interior Ministry. Iran has around 46.7 million eligible voters, a majority of whom are under the age of 30.

The presidential poll has exposed ideological and class divisions.

Mr. Ahmadinejad, who campaigned on issues such as land redistribution, state-control of natural resources and removing unemployment is said to have



**NECK-AND-NECK RACE:** Iranians line up to vote at a polling station in Teheran on Friday. — AFP

won support from a large section of rural and urban poor. "Mr. Ahmadinejad's basic impulse is to revive the Shia tradition of welfare and public service through his economic policies," Abbas Maleki, head of the Teheran-based International Institute for Caspian Studies told *The Hindu*.

#### Slick commercials

In contrast, Mr. Rafsanjani's lifestyle has been perceived as opulent and his campaign, which

targeted the well to do new generation of voters through slick television commercials, apparently did little to woo the underprivileged majority.

Observers point out that the elections should also be seen as representing a struggle between the young generation of right wingers, who emerged as a cohesive force during the eight year Iran-Iraq war and a section of the clerical old guard, over the control of key government bodies.

Mr. Ahmadinejad, who is close to the hardline IRGC, is also part of the young radical Abadgaran group whose members were first elected to the Teheran municipal council, and then dominated Parliament after the February 2004 elections. The Presidency is now the last bastion that they want to control.

The major pro-reform bodies, student groups, and prominent clerical organisations have backed Mr. Rafsanjani Mehdi

Karroubi — who narrowly lost to Mr. Ahmadinejad in the first round and complained about poll irregularities, has declared his support for Mr. Rafsanjani. His backing could prove valuable, as he is the general secretary of the influential Militant Clergy Association.

Mr. Rafsanjani has also been supported by two other prominent clerical organisations with a wide following — the Teheran Militant Clergy Association and the Ansar-i Hizbullah.

THE HINDU  
THE HINDU

# TOO CLOSE TO CALL IN IRAN POLL BATTLE

**EDMUND BLAIR**  
TEHRAN, JUNE 24

**I**RANIANS voted on Friday in a tight Presidential run-off that could toughen policy towards the West and end tentative moves towards liberalisation if a hardline candidate beats Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani.

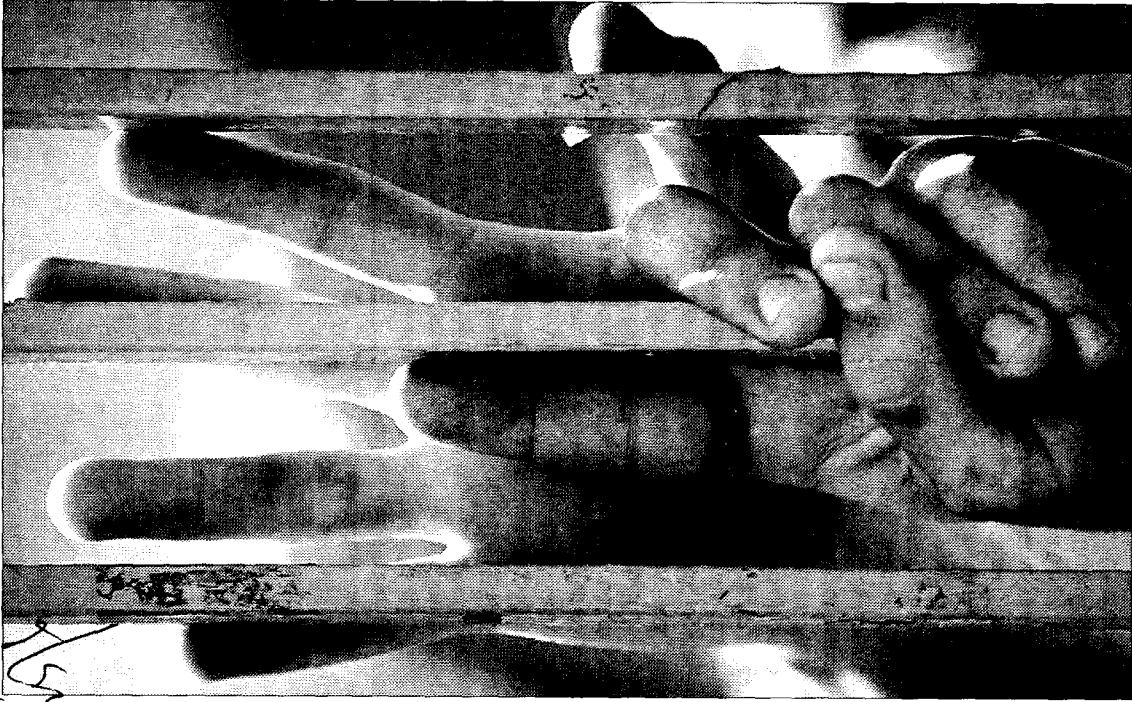
Political analysts say the election result is too close to call, with the contest reflecting deep social divisions apparent in the Islamic Republic's population of 67 million people. Voters stood in long lines in poor south Tehran, a stronghold of ultra-conservative Tehran Mayor Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who has won over Iran's religious poor with promises to share out Iran's oil wealth more fairly.

"I will vote for Ahmadinejad because he wants to cut off the hands of those who are stealing the country's national wealth. He wants to fight poverty, fraud and discrimination," said Rahmatollah Izadpanah (41), queuing in south Tehran.

In wealthier uptown parts of the capital, Rafsanjani voters turned out in fear that Ahmadinejad would revive the strictures and purges that followed the 1979 Islamic revolution. "Our freedom is at stake," said Somayeh (23), wearing a veil but also with make-up that conservatives frown upon.

Turnout appeared less solid in north Tehran and a few of those questioned backed Ahmadinejad. Independent estimates of turnout in the rest of Iran were not immediately available. Polls are due to close at 7 p.m. but may be extended up to 11 p.m., as in the first round. Initial results are expected early on Saturday.

Rafsanjani, a cleric bidding to regain the post he held from 1989 to 1997, has recast himself as a liberal with vows to preserve the reforms of outgoing President Mohammad Khatami, who loosened Islamic social rules and pursued détente with the West. "I intend to play a historic political role... to stop the domination of extremism," Rafsanjani (70) said after voting. Ahmadinejad (48), a surprise contender in the run-off, says ties with Washington are not a priority.



**Above: A voter's ink-stained finger is visible as he waits to see Presidential candidate Mahmoud Ahmadinejad at a polling center in Tehran on Friday. From top: Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and candidates Akbar Rafsanjani and Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.** Reuters

The former instructor of the Basij militia, zealous guardians of the revolution's ideals, is a staunch supporter of Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who has the final say over Iran's nuclear policy and all other matters of state.

Opponents fear Ahmadinejad will purge ministries and other bodies, citing what he did to municipal bodies as Tehran Mayor. The Interior, Culture and Economy Ministries are among those held by Khatami-backed reformists. Bijan Zanganeh, Oil Minister of OPEC's second largest producer, made his loyalties clear by turning up at a Rafsanjani rally this week. "Today is the beginning of a new political era for the Iranian nation," Ahmadine-



splits among Iran's electorate. Rafsanjani voters tend to be from the upper and middle classes who are tired of Iran's isolation, want more social freedom and back his plans to liberalise the economy. Ahmadinejad has most support among religiously conservative poor, who struggle to make ends meet. —Reuters

## A dark horse emerges

**MICHAEL SLACKMAN**  
TEHRAN, JUNE 24

IRAN'S biggest surprise in last week's Presidential contest was the emergence of little-known Tehran Mayor Mahmoud Ahmadinejad as the second-highest vote winner, catapulting him into Friday's run-off. That has led to widespread charges of vote rigging and a systematic, organised conspiracy to alter the outcome.

Many people fear Ahmadinejad because his social and economic ideas are a throwback to the early days of the Revolution. Others simply cannot believe that a man who has not been part of the political elite might leapfrog over elder statesmen of the country to take power. In one piece of campaign literature, Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, the other Presidential candidate, simply lists his resume side by side with Ahmadinejad's, as though nothing more need be said.

Critics, though, have not so far presented any real proof of vote rigging, and instead have talked about unfair and inappropriate influence peddling.

"Military commanders gave talks and encouraged people to vote a certain way," said Mehdi Karroubi, a former speaker of Parliament and Presidential candidate who created a scandal here when he charged vote rigging in the first round.

"We have evidence that the Basij (hardline militia volunteers) and the military were interfering with the vote."

A Western diplomat, analysing the vote for his home office, said it did not appear that a huge, systemic fraud had occurred. On condition of anonymity, the diplomat said the country was too large, and the electorate too diverse, for widespread fraud. —NYT

## IRAN PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

Iranian's vote on Friday in the country's first presidential election run-off, between former President Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani and Tehran mayor Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, to select a successor to reformist President Mohammad Khatami



**Ahmadinejad (48)**

- Hardline conservative, has said access to nuclear technology is Iran's right and that it should not yield to international pressure
- Said relations with the US are not key to solving Iran's problems
- Would be the first non-cleric president since 1981
- Leading member of a new generation of lay politicians fiercely loyal to Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei, who has the final say in matters of state
- Special forces officer in the Revolutionary Guards and instructor with the Basij religious militia, loyal to principles of the 1979 Islamic revolution



**Rafsanjani (70)**

- Pragmatic conservative, favours economic liberalisation and détente with the West while keeping Ayatollah Khamenei's system of clerical rule
- Said he would champion reforms and create jobs for the poor
- President from 1989 to 1997, served as parliamentary speaker and armed forces commander. Failed to become speaker again in 2000
- Central figure since 1979 revolution, had a key role in decisions during the 1980-88 war with Iraq and in covert arms-for-hostages deals with the US in the 1990s
- Distrusted by hardliners and liberals for his flexible political style

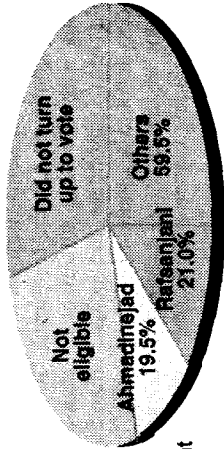
### FIRST ROUND RESULTS

- No candidates polled the minimum 50% required for an outright win
- Run-off is between two candidates with highest total votes
- First run-off vote in eight elections since 1979

Total population: 67 million  
Turnout: 63% of eligible voters (29.5 million)

Source: Reuters

IE Graphics/B.K. SHARMA



## 'Iran to enrich uranium, whatever the result'

**TEHRAN:** Iran will eventually resume its controversial uranium enrichment activities regardless of the result of the Islamic republic's Presidential election, the Foreign Ministry insisted on Friday. "Whoever is the next President, a permanent suspension is not on the cards," Foreign Ministry Spokesman Hamid Reza Asefi said. "Decisions on the nuclear question are taken in a collective way and at the highest levels of the regime," he commented, even though he said the President "does have a certain influence".

A victory by hardliner Mahmoud Ahmadinejad would remove a moderating influence from within the regime and could put the Islamic republic on a collision course with the West. However, Akbar Rafsanjani is expected to stick by a freeze of sensitive N-activities and talks with Britain, France and Germany. —AFP

## 10-17 20/6 A hard choice for Iranian reformers

**T**he pro-reform camp in Iran suffered a severe setback in the presidential election held on June 17. The two candidates identified with this camp finished third and fifth in a field of seven. While none of the seven secured 50 per cent of the votes cast, required to win in the first round, the two men who will contest the June 24 run-off are known to be close to the theocratic establishment. One of them, former President Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, had a major role in creating the system in which clerics control the levers of political and economic power. The other candidate, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, is a favourite of the Revolutionary Guards and the Basij militia, the theocracy's storm troopers. Iranian reformers could not even take consolation from the voter turnout. Some ardent advocates of change had urged voters to stay away as a protest against an establishment that has nothing but contempt for the democratic processes. The turnout was just five percentage points lower than the 68 per cent recorded in the 2001 election, which was won by the pro-reform candidate, Mohammed Khatami. Iranian liberals are now left with the unpalatable option of rallying behind Mr. Rafsanjani in a tactical move to shut out a hardliner who can nullify the slight progress made during the eight years of the Khatami presidency. This is a sorry outcome from an electoral exercise in which all the candidates portrayed themselves as agents of reform.

To a large extent, Iranian liberals have no one to blame but themselves. Over the last eight years they were not able to make up their minds on how they should work to achieve their objectives. Some argued that the reform movement should dissociate itself from the theocratic system and make it give way through a civil disobedience campaign. Others, including Mr. Khatami, believed reforms could be undertaken from within the system. The reform camp's failure to get its act together alienated the constituencies that eight years ago supported its cause with enormous zeal. These weaknesses were on display during the 2005 election as well. While the Basij and Revolutionary Guards turned out in strength to rally support for Mr. Ahmadinejad, the reformers did not appear to make a serious effort to mobilise their followers. With the hardliner securing 19.5 per cent to Mr. Rafsanjani's 21 per cent in the first round, the forward-looking forces in Iran will have to work hard if they are to hold on to the little ground they gained under Mr. Khatami's stewardship. If the record set by Mr. Rafsanjani during his first presidency between 1989 and 1997 is an indication, democratic reforms will at best move at glacial pace if he is elected once again. However, he has a reputation of being 'pragmatic', so Iranian liberals will be hoping against hope that the reforms so ardently desired by the masses can be taken forward.

THE HINDU

# 9/11 attacks led to Iraq invasion, <sup>to Asia</sup> says Bush <sup>Ogawa</sup>

WASHINGTON: <sup>19/6</sup> The United States is at war in Iraq because of the September 11, 2001 attacks, U.S. President George W. Bush said on Saturday.

"We went to war because we were attacked, and we are at war today because there are still people out there who want to harm our country and hurt our citizens," Mr. Bush said in his weekly radio address.

"Some may disagree with my decision to remove Saddam Hussein from power, but all of us can agree that the world's terrorists have now made Iraq a central front in the war on terror," he went on.

"These foreign terrorists violently oppose the rise of a free and democratic Iraq, because they know that when we replace despair and hatred with liberty and hope, they lose their recruiting grounds for terror," he argued.

He ruled out any timetable for withdrawing the 130,000 U.S. soldiers currently deployed in Iraq and made it clear that it will not be anytime soon.

Terrorists "know there is no room for them in a free and democratic Middle East, so the terrorists and militants are trying to get us to retreat," he said.

"Their goal is to get us to leave before Iraqis have had a chance to show the region what a government that is elected and truly accountable to its citizens can do for its people. — AFP

19 JUN 2006

THE HINDU

# Iranian Presidential polls go into second round

26.5%  
9ran  
40.12  
19/6

Former Mayor of Teheran emerges challenger to Rafsanjani

Atul Aneja

**TEHERAN:** After an unexpectedly high turnout, Iran's keenly contested Presidential elections has continued to throw up surprises, with the former Mayor of Teheran emerging as the challenger to frontrunner Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani in next week's run-off polls.

The former Mayor, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, regarded as highly conservative rose to second place following Mr. Rafsanjani. Mr. Ahmadinejad received 19.5 per cent of the 32 million votes cast during Friday's elections, while Mr. Rafsanjani polled nearly 21 per cent.

## Unprecedented

The second round of elections scheduled for June 24 has become necessary as none of the seven Presidential candidates got the mandatory fifty per cent votes. Under Iran's election law, polling will now enter its second phase in which the top two candidates will take part in a run-off-a contingency that has never arisen in the past.

For many, the poor showing by Mostafa Moin, widely regarded as the symbol of radical reforms among the contestants was unexpected. Mr. Moin, a for-



**CHANGE OF GUARD:** Outgoing Iranian President Mohammad Khatami visits the election headquarters at the Interior Ministry a day after the presidential elections, in Teheran on Saturday. - PHOTO: AP

mer Education Minister ended up in the fifth place, behind former Parliament speaker Mehdi Karroubi and Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf, receiving less than 14 per cent of the votes. Observers

point out that that the results have been fragmented because voters could choose from an array of candidates, who represented a wide variety of views. Nevertheless, all the candidates

favoured reforms, but differed on their contents and ways to realise them. Earlier, nearly 32 million people out of around 47 million eligible voters showed up for polling.

19 JUN 2005 THE HINDU

# Run-off to decide President

U. Arif 5-8 19/6

Associated Press

## POLLS ARE A TRIUMPH OVER US LIES AND DECEIT: KHAMENEI

TENHRAN, June 18. — Iran will hold the first runoff presidential election in its history, officials said today, after voters failed to give any of the candidates an outright majority and hard-liners made an unexpectedly strong showing.

Ayatollah Hashemi Rafsanjari, a pragmatist considered the favourite from the start, held the lead in vote counting today with nearly 21 per cent and was set to enter the second round. But the lacklustre performance

of reformist Mostafa Moin, considered his main rival, was a surprise. Yesterday's voting showed a large turnout in a resounding rejection of a youth-led boycott with lines of voters forcing polling to continue four hours overtime.

Iran's hard-line leaders crowded that the American President, Mr George W Bush helped fuel the turnout by sharply criticising the elections as undemocratic and angering many Iranians. The race for Number 2 and a spot

in the run-off was up for grabs between Tehran's hard-line mayor, Mahmoud Ahmehdinejad, and former parliament speaker Mahdi Karroubi, both considered long shots during the campaign. As the vote counting began in Tehran and surrounding areas, the last to be tallied, Ahmehdinejad pulled into second with 19.5 per cent. He reportedly had the support of Iran's most hard-line factions, including the Revolutionary Guards.

Mahdi Karroubi, who was popular in rural areas, fell behind at 17.4 percent. At a news conference, Karroubi accused Revolutionary Guards and their civilian vigilante wings of intimidating voters and appealed for an investigation.

Supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei declared that Iran had dealt a major defeat to the "lies and deceit" of US President Mr George W Bush by turning out en masse in presidential elections.

Khamenei slammed as "stupid prejudice" comments by "the disgraced" Bush on the eve of the election in which the US president said the vote ignored the "basic standards of democracy".

"With your solid, collective and glorious presence, once again you defused the conspiracy of your enemy," Khamenei said to Iranians in a message read by a TV channel announcer today.

"Your irrational enemy, with a wrong perception to frighten and deceive you, in a statement full of lies and deceit," he said.

# Iran votes, rebuffs US barbs

Tehran, June 17 (Reuters): Iranians voted for a President today and their leaders rebuffed US criticism of the poll which pragmatic cleric Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani is the narrow favourite to win.

Queues formed at some polling stations in Tehran soon after they opened in hot sunshine for Iran's 47 million, mostly young, voters. Official results are due tomorrow.

Many Iranians say they will not endorse a system where real power is held by unelected clerics who barred all but a handful of more than 1,000 presidential hopefuls. Yet the poll has aroused more interest than expected among voters.

"Even if we think it is pre-cooked, we should vote. I'll

vote for Moin," said Siavosh Kayyal, 22, a computer engineer, referring to leading reformist candidate Mostafa Moin.

Keeping up a barrage of US criticism, secretary of state Condoleezza Rice said democracy in Iran was "moving backwards" and Washington would watch to see if Tehran adopted a course "more in step with what is going on in the region".

Iran denies US claims it seeks nuclear weapons and backs terrorism.

Bush's pre-emptive attack on the election drew derisive responses from many Iranian leaders, including reformists vowing to strengthen democratic institutions and trench human rights.

"It might not be an ideal election for us, but the basics are there," Moin said at his campaign headquarters.

Intelligence minister Ali Yunesi said Bush's remarks were disrespectful to Iran and the rival candidates. "No politician calls an election undemocratic before it is even held," he said.

Unelected Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei told Iranians they were not just choosing a president. "Whoever you vote for among those seven candidates, it's a vote for him, the Islamic republic and the constitution," he said.

Aides to Moin have complained that hardliners beat up his supporters at some campaign meetings. Rafsanjani, who wants bet-

ter ties with the West, has topped most opinion polls, often unreliable in the past, before what could be Iran's closest vote since the 1979 Islamic revolution. "I have promised people to continue reforms and I am sure I can deliver my promises," the 70-year-old said after voting.

The wily cleric, who served as President from 1989 to 1997, needs to win over half the votes cast to avoid an unprecedented run-off, probably next Friday, between the top two vote-getters. His nearest rivals are Moin, 54, and conservative ex-police chief Mohammad Bager Qalibaf, 43, with Tehran's ex-mayor Mahmoud Ahmadijad emerging as a dark-horse conservative con-

A woman votes in a Tehran mosque. (AFP)





# Presidential campaigns target youth

Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani frontrunner in Friday's Iranian elections

Atul Aneja

TEHERAN: Campaigning for Iran's Presidential election has ended but the sidewalks leading to the sprawling Teheran University campus are still packed with young people who are well aware that their votes will decide as to which of the top three candidates will win Friday's poll.

Out of Iran's 48-million voting population, 30 million have not witnessed the 1979 Islamic Revolution. Under Iranian law, all citizens above the age of 15 can vote.

That has meant that all of the candidates — from hardliners, conservatives to liberals — have had to aggressively woo the young. That the votes of the new generation matter has become apparent in the manner in which candidates have executed their campaigns, either on television or on the streets. For instance, a television advertisement for the recently-resigned police chief Mohammed Baqer Qalibaf, a leading candidate, showcases him as a dashing former airlines pilot. Against the backdrop of the rising sun and a catchy musical score, Mr. Qalibaf is shown carrying out the take-off of an Iran Airlines plane. The white plane is then shown soaring into the blue sky as the music reaches its crescendo.

## Tight race

An entire wall outside the university campus bears his poster, showing him dressed in a trendy outfit and smiling appealingly at the street below. Among Iran's three top candidates who are running a tight race, Mr. Qalibaf, however, is not the frontrunner. That title goes to Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, who has been Iran's President twice be-



**FINELY-POISED BATTLE:** Iranian girls sporting stickers and posters of presidential candidate and former President Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani during a pre-election gathering in Teheran on the last day of campaigning on Wednesday. — PHOTO: REUTERS

fore. He is projecting himself as a moderniser — a man who wants to take Iran forward, so long as the country does not forget its Islamic revolutionary roots.

He has carried out an aggressive campaign, where young boys and girls have been specially recruited to canvass for him. Mr. Rafsanjani's campaign managers have fanned out, and his election offices have mushroomed all over the city. In some of these offices compact discs recording his interview with about

20 young people, which was aired on Iran's state television, could be seen being packed for last-minute distribution. In that interview, the cleric answered question from young men and women about his views on freedom, relations between the sexes, employment, love and death.

Reformist candidate Mostafa Moin has also led a forceful campaign targeting the youth. A television commercial for Mr. Moin shows Saeed Hajjarian, known as a pioneering reformist before he was shot and paralysed by a

hardliner group in March 2000. Awareness among candidates that people had become wary of elections partly explains the extra effort that they have put up in the campaign.

But despite their exertions many may not come to vote. "The real power is not with the President but, is, instead, held by a body of unelected clerics. So there is no point in voting," Cina Foroutan, a student at the Teheran University told *The Hindu*.

A group of young women also expressed similar views, but said

they would reluctantly go to vote.

"We are not exactly for Western style freedoms for women, but we demand real equality and right to exercise opportunities," Elnaz Salimi, a medical student said. Seyed Shahab Aleddin, who is pursuing a master's degree in chemistry, pointed out that disillusionment among the youth has set in because reformist President Mohammad Khatami, despite being elected twice, could not meet the aspirations of the youth.

# Iran's reformist threatens to quit poll

Mostafa Moin protests against violent attacks on his supporters by religious extremists

Robert Tait

**ISFAHAN (IRAN):** The leading reformist candidate in Iran's presidential election has threatened to pull out in protest at violent attacks on his supporters by religious extremists.

In an interview with this correspondent, Mostafa Moin also implied a possible link between the assaults and a spate of bombings that has killed 10 persons in the run-up to Friday's poll. He said the violence was aimed at persuading people to vote for one of the headline militarist candidates in the eight-man race.

"I have written to the authorities and the people in charge calling them to find the roots of these violent actions [against his supporters] and also the purpose of these acts and violent confrontations is to lead us into a situation where there is a low turnout or where people change their voting intentions. If they create tense circumstances, then people might think that if they vote for a military candidate, there will be peace and stability."

## Ex-Minister beaten up

On Saturday, Ebrahim Yazdi, a former Foreign Minister and leader of the Iran Freedom Movement, became the latest Moin supporter to be beaten up after arriving at the city's airport.

Iranian authorities say three little-known Arab separatist groups, aided by foreign intelligence agencies, have claimed responsibility for the Khuzestan bombings on Sunday. The claim is disputed. No group has admitted the Teheran attacks, which the Government says were not



**FRONTRUNNER:** Mostafa Moin (second left), leading reformist candidate in Iran's presidential elections, and his wife Zahra Dasghehb Lari on their way to a rally in the Khurasan Province on the last day of his campaign on Wednesday. - PHOTO: AP

related to the Ahvaz incident.

Speaking aboard his campaign bus in Isfahan province, Mr. Moin, the Islamic Iran Participation Front candidate, did not say who he thought was behind the blasts. Asked if he believed the attacks had official approval, he replied: "I do not consider it improbable. If they continue in this way, my supporters will

hold an emergency meeting to study the situation and they will reconsider our participation in the election.

"Our preference is to continue until the end, but if we consider that the first rule and regulation of democracy, that is, a free election, is not observed, then we will have a decision to take. If this continues, the elec-

tion will be under serious threat."

Any withdrawal could seriously dent voter turnout, which the regime publicly insists must be high to improve Iran's democratic credentials. But a low turnout could benefit one of the four headline conservative candidates whose support lies within a small hard core of religious

voters more likely to turn out.

## Most likely beneficiary

The most likely beneficiary would be Mohammed Baqer Qalibaf, a former national police chief and revolutionary guard air force commander, and also the favoured candidate of Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

Ayatollah Khamenei has described voting in Friday's poll as a "religious duty."

Polls have shown a surge in support for Mr. Moin, putting him second to the frontrunner, the centrist ex-President Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, and now ahead of Mr Qalibaf.

Mr. Moin, a former Higher Education Minister under Mr. Khatami, was initially disqualified from standing by the Guardian Council, an unelected body that vets candidate for their loyalty to the Islamic system. He was reinstated by Ayatollah Khamenei after reformers threatened a voter boycott in protest at the wholesale disqualification of candidates.

The attacks on Mr. Moin supporters appear to have coincided with his rise in the polls. In one assault, Behzad Nabavi, a former parliamentary speaker, was heckled and then assaulted by more than 100 hardliners as he tried to address a pro-Moin rally in the holy city of Qom, home of Iran's leading ayatollahs.

Mr. Nabavi was left with a black eye and a cut forehead. He described the beating as his worst since he was interrogated by the Savak, the Shah's notorious secret police.

The assaults reflect the bitter hostility towards Mr. Moin from hardliners. He has angered them by saying he would consider stalling Iran's nuclear programme under certain circumstances and by promising to appoint a human rights minister and release political prisoners.

He said much of the criticism of Iran's human rights record was deserved. "If the criticism was not justified, I would not be so concerned," he said.

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# 31 killed in Iraq suicide attacks

## Australian hostage freed in a military operation

FD-16 1676 v. Am (1)

**BAQUBA:** Thirty-one persons were killed in two suicide bombings in Iraq on Wednesday, including 23 at an Iraqi army base canteen, as Iraqi forces rescued an Australian hostage held for almost six weeks.

The bloodiest attack occurred at lunchtime when a man dressed in an Iraqi army uniform blew himself up at a base canteen in Kholes, a town northeast of Baghdad, security sources said.

A total of 23 were killed and 29 wounded, most of them soldiers, said local council member

Samira Shibli. Hours later, eight policemen were killed and vehicles left ablaze in a second attack, when a bomber targeted their patrol in southern Baghdad.

"A suicide car bomber detonated his vehicle next to a motorised police patrol in the Zaafaranyah district in southern Baghdad around 4:15 pm (1245 GMT)," said a defence ministry source.

The ordeal of Australian contractor Douglas Wood ended on Wednesday with his rescue by Iraqi and U.S. military forces.

In an operation that took even Australian authorities by surprise, an Iraqi military unit backed by U.S. troops freed the 63-year-old U.S.-based engineering contractor and took a number of militants captive.

"I am delighted to inform the House that the Australian hostage in Iraq, Douglas Wood, is safe," Prime Minister John Howard told the Australian parliament.

"Mr Wood was recovered a short while ago in Baghdad in a military operation that I am told was conducted by Iraqi forces in

cooperation in a general way with force elements of the United States."

Mr. Wood was kidnapped in late April by a rebel group calling itself the Shura Council of the Mujahedeen of Iraq, which initially demanded that Australia pull its 800 troops out of Iraq.

Mr. Howard, whose government is a close ally of Washington, said no ransom had been paid to secure the hostage's release and the drama had not affected Australia's commitment to the U.S.-led campaign in Iraq.

— AFP

# Saddam grilling video released

Associated Press

BAGHDAD, June 13. — The tribunal that will put Saddam Hussein on trial released a new video today of the former dictator being questioned by magistrates about the killing of 50 Iraqis in retaliation for a failed assassination attempt in 1982.

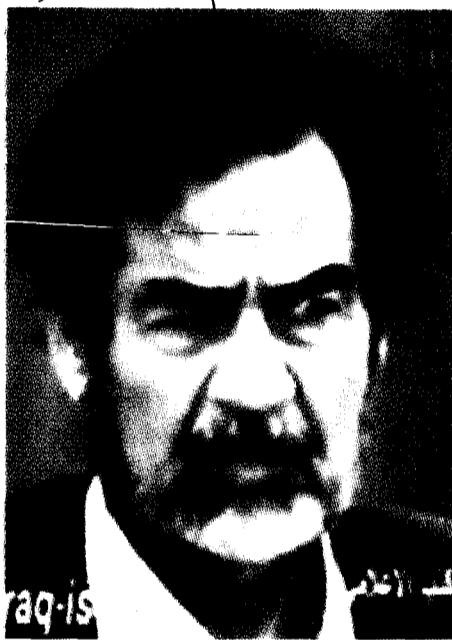
The video from the Iraqi Special Tribunal showed a bearded Saddam wearing a dark-colored jacket and white open-collared shirt being questioned by chief judge Mr Raid Juhi. Four other members of Saddam's administration also were shown in the video.

It was unclear when the video was made, and Saddam's chief lawyer, Khalil al-Duleimi, said he would have to see it before commenting. The tribunal said the lawyer was present during the questioning.

An announcement that accompanied the tape said Saddam was being questioned about crimes related to the execution of at least 50 Iraqis in 1982 in the Shi'ite town of Dujail, 80 km north of Baghdad, in retaliation for the failed assassination attempt.

The new video also depicted Hussein Rashid Mohammed, a former General of the Republican Guard, and Taher Tawfiq al-Ani, a senior Baath Party official and adviser on Kurdish affairs. They were questioned concerning the 1987-88 Anfal campaign, a depopulation plan in which hundreds of thousands of Kurds were killed or expelled from northern Iraq.

The two other men shown were Barzan Abd al-Ghafur Sulayman Majidal-Tikriti and Muzahim Sa'b Hassan al-Tikriti. The first was a special Republican Guard commander and Saddam's cousin who was captured on 23 July 2003. He was No. 11 on the American list of most-wanted Iraqis. The other headed Iraq's air defences under Saddam and who was captured on 23 April 2003. He was 12th on the list.



A videograb shows a bemused Saddam Hussein during his questioning. — AFP

## Violence kills 14

Four suicide car bombings and other insurgent attacks today killed 14 people, and at least 16 Iraqis were wounded after militants opened fire on authorities trying to evacuate the injured from one of the blasts.

The wave of attacks in Baghdad, Samarra and Tikrit came as radical anti-American Shi'ite cleric Muqtada al-Sadr met with the Russia ambassador and tribal chiefs from the insurgent hotbeds of Fallujah and Ramadi. Russia and Al-Sadr fiercely opposed the war. The meeting between al-Sadr and Russian ambassador Mr Vladimir Chamov in the holy city of Najaf, south of the capital, seemed to be a sign of the cleric's desire to return to active politics after going into isolation following clashes between his militia and US troops.

# Chain blasts rock Iran ahead of polls

Ahvaz (Iran), June 12 (Reuters): Bomb blasts in Tehran and the southwestern oil city of Ahvaz killed at least seven people and wounded 73 today, five days before Iran's presidential election.

Four bombs in Ahvaz, capital of the partly Arabic-speaking province of Khuzestan, targeted government buildings.

"We had six martyrs and 70 wounded," Ahvaz governor Mohammad Jaafar Sarraami said.

The Popular Democratic Front of Ahvaz, which is campaigning for an independent Khuzestan, denied it was behind the attacks, but said another Arab group calling itself the Ahvazi Revolutionary Martyrs' Brigades had claimed responsibility.

Hours later, a small bomb concealed in a rubbish container exploded in central Tehran, killing at least one person. "There is one dead and three wounded," said interior



An Iranian Al-Alam TV image shows a woman at the site of a blast in Ahvaz. (AFP)

ministry spokesperson Jahanbakhsh Khanjani.

Police cordoned off the area where the blast occurred in a street off Imam Hossein square in a crowded commercial district.

Reuters photographer Raheb Homavandi said he had seen the body of the victim, a man. Ambulances rushed to the scene.

There was no immediate word on who had carried out the Tehran bombing or

whether it was linked to the attacks in Ahvaz.

Gholamreza Shariati, deputy governor of Khuzestan province, where five people were killed in ethnic unrest in April, said earlier that women and children were among the bomb casualties in Ahvaz.

The bombs targeted the governor's office in Ahvaz, 550 km southwest of Tehran, as well as two local government departments and a housing complex for state media employees.

A pool of blood stained the floor of a waiting room at the governor's office, where the explosion destroyed ceilings and smashed windows. The mangled wreckage of a car which might have carried the bomb lay in the street nearby.

Police sealed off the area, littered with broken glass.

Khuzestan contains the vast bulk of Iran's 132 billion barrels of proven oil reserves, the world's second largest.

THE TELEGRAPH

# The tussle for the Iranian Presidency

Will the June 17 election produce the statesman the country needs?

Handwritten notes: "10-11", "w. B. 2", and a circled "A" with a checkmark.

Hamid Ansari

IRANIANS TAKE their soccer seriously. Iran's victory over Bahrain last week in the World Cup qualifier resulted in an outburst of rejoicing rarely seen in Teheran. Men and women (some without head scarves) danced on the streets and tore up posters of candidates in the June 17 presidential elections. The police did not interfere. Credible foreign observers have not confirmed reports of police brutality carried by some opposition news channels in the United States.

Even those who entertain sentiments of hatred towards Iran concede the regularity of elections since the 1979 Revolution. This break from the tradition of an absolutist monarchy is to be recalled as the country prepares for its ninth presidential election. Article 6 of the Iranian Constitution stipulates that the country "must be administered on the basis of public opinion expressed by means of elections" at different levels.

The President is elected for a four-year term by direct vote. Article 115 prescribes his qualifications: Iranian origin, Iranian nationality, administrative capacity and resourcefulness, a good past record, trustworthiness and piety, convinced beliefs in the fundamental principles of the Islamic Republic and the official religious creed of Iran. He is elected by an absolute majority of the votes polled. If a clear majority is not obtained, a second round is held for the two candidates obtaining the highest number in the first round.

The percentage of eligible voter turnout in previous elections tells its own story: 67.8 (1980), 64.9 (1981), 54.9 (1985), 54.6 (1989), 50.6 (1993), 83.5 (1997), and 63.0 (2001). The first President, Beni Sadr, was removed from office for "political incompetence" and fled the country. The second, Mohammad Ali Rajai, was assassinated. Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani in his two terms (1989 and 1993) got a bare majority casting their votes. Mohammad Khatami, who started on a high note in 1997 with 83 per cent voting, saw the percentage slip to 63 in 2001.

Despite being the head of the executive, the President concedes primacy to the Leader of the Revolution who under the system developed by Imam Khomeini (Rule of the Jurist) pronounces policy, heads the armed forces, and makes the senior-most appointments. This makes Iran a hierarchy of the Shia clergy and dilutes the democratic features of the system.

## Revolution under scrutiny

Twenty-six years after the Revolution the concept itself, and the role of the clergy in governance, is the subject of critical scrutiny. Even in 1979, and while the Constitution was being drafted, some senior clerics had cautioned against the proposed inroads into its democratic essence: "We should not render sovereignty of the people empty. The people may be silent and accept this article today, but later they will abolish the constitution."

The reform debates in the Khatami era, and his inability to push them beyond a point, demonstrate the debilitating impact



**FRONT-RUNNER?:** Iranian women walk past a banner of presidential candidate Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani in Teheran. - PHOTO: REUTERS

of this approach. Despite it, change has taken place. Political debate is freer, there is greater social freedom and less of surveillance. The reformist agenda has become more radical with some calling for a referendum on the Constitution itself. They seek to derive support from the referendum clause in the Constitution (Article 59) but seem to overlook the stipulation that any such exercise cannot cover "the Islamic character of the political system."

On one count, more than 20 factions are involved in electioneering for June 17. Five of the eight candidates are being supported by various conservative groups; the faction support for the reformists is less clear and their hope lies in a large voter turnout to tilt the result in their favour.

The most prominent candidate supported by some (but not all) conservative factions is Hashemi Rafsanjani. His experience, record of service and negotiating skills make him in the eyes of many, the man of the hour for Iran. The diversion of votes to other conservative candidates could however harm him. His 14-point programme is focussed on economic and social change and "smaller government." Iran, in his view, can benefit from globalisation and needs to open up to international organisations. He is careful about the youth who constitute the majority: "There is no use imposing tastes, being strict and going backward. Whoever becomes the President cannot work without

considering the demands and conditions of the society."

The former Minister for Higher Education, Mustafa Moin, is the candidate on whom the reformists pin their hopes. He was disqualified by the Guardian Council but was allowed to contest on the intervention of the Leader. Cynics say this was a Machiavellian device to downsize him! Mr. Moin has modelled his campaign on Mr. Khatami's in 1997. His slogan is simplistic but appealing: "Democracy is the only answer to threats against Iran." It is also essential for economic growth and sustainable development. He advocates a free press, an end to "extensive corruption", to Internet censorship, and favours cultural diversity, respect for ethnic languages and all religious groups.

The candidates and their programmes are silent or evasive on the core issues of public concern: employment, investment, housing, foreign relations, nuclear enrichment. Of these, the most pressing is unemployment. Estimates put it in the range of 10.4 per cent to 11.8 per cent.

A substantial number of young people in technical and professional cadres (figures range from 100,000 to 250,000) are leaving Iran every year. With an annual growth rate of 5.4 per cent, the economy is unable to cope with the problem. According to one estimate, a growth rate of 9.5 per cent is required to bring unemployment below 10 per cent. Massive urbanisation, and absence

of labour-intensive employment schemes, does not help matters. A direct result of this is disenchantment among youth.

## Foreign policy

The un-stated major factor in elections is foreign policy, principally relations with the U.S. Ending the economic-investment gridlock, and the key to higher growth rates, lies in ending Iran's isolation. The system too is conscious of it and is playing the limited cards at its disposal carefully. Time is the critical factor. Some in the U.S. appreciate the geo-political imperative of having a friendlier Iran in relation to American strategy in the Persian Gulf and Central Asia; others (and more influential ones) feel greater pressure would land "the rotten apple" (Khrushchev's phrase) in their lap.

Iran's history in the 20th century has many examples of dexterous handling of overwhelming external pressure. Will the June 17 election produce the situation and the statesman for responding to the challenge? How will the balance between the demands for greater democracy and freedom, on the one hand, and mature handling of national affairs, on the other, be arrived at? Will voter apathy prevail over the exuberance of youth for a change, or will it be the other way round?

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

# No date set for Saddam trial

Baghdad, June 7

IRAQ'S GOVERNMENT backed away on Tuesday from suggestions that Saddam Hussein would be tried within weeks, admitting it was up to an independent special tribunal to decide when he appears in court.

Bombers struck across Iraq, with blasts near Kirkuk and in Baghdad killing at least 19 people and wounding nearly 70, ending several days of relative calm.

Iraq's president and the prime minister's spokesman had said in the last week that Saddam could go on trial within two months, popular announcements apparently designed to show Iraqis that progress was being made in bringing him to justice.

But the Special Tribunal, set up in late 2003 to try senior members of the former regime, issued a statement saying no date had been set, and the prime minister's spokesman conceded on Tuesday that any decision was up to the tribunal.

"A fixed date has not been presented," Laith Kubba, spokesman for Prime Minister Ibrahim Jaafari, told reporters.

"(The Special Tribunal) assured me that they have a media official and they wish that information is given by them directly. I refer you to the spokesman for the tribunal."

A tribunal spokesman also denied a decision had been made to focus on just a dozen of the

crimes of which Saddam is accused, as Kubba said on Monday, in order to bring him to trial more quickly.

Since Saddam was taken into custody in December 2003, Iraqi authorities have been under growing pressure to bring him and his senior lieutenants to justice.

The government hopes any conviction — including the possibility of the death penalty — will dent the insurgency by convincing former regime loyalists that Saddam's days are over, so it is pushing for the earliest possible trial.

A high-profile conviction could also help build popular support for the government before a mid-December election.

"Many people lost fathers and sons and want to know where the justice is," Kubba said on Tuesday. "There's popular pressure on us."

In the past, tribunal officials have indicated that Saddam's deputies will be brought to trial first and Saddam himself may not appear in court until 2006.

## Deadly bombings

At least five car bombs exploded across Iraq on Tuesday. Four attacks were in or near the northern town of Hawija, close to the strategic oil city of Kirkuk. A suicide bomber blew up his car near a US base, another beside an Iraqi army checkpoint and a third close to a market, the police said.

Reuters

08 JUN 2005

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# Surge in Iraq violence leaves 750 dead in May

Targeted killings heighten religious and ethnic tensions

Atul Aneja

**MANAMA:** There has been a sudden surge in suicide attacks unseen in other conflict zones that have powered the on-going guerrilla offensive in Iraq that claimed 750 lives in May.

The 90 suicide attacks last month accounted for most of the casualties.

The trend has continued with a suicide car bomber killing at least 10 Iraqis and wounding 10 more at a location 80 km north of Baghdad, U.S. military on Friday said.

A day earlier, guerrillas unleashed three suicide bombings, within an hour after gunmen travelling in cars sprayed gunfire in a crowded market in Baghdad. More than 38 persons were killed in the barrage of strikes.

Analysts point out that the Iraqi resistance has extensively used suicide bombings as a weapon of war, in far greater degree when compared to other areas of conflict such as Chechnya and Palestine. On Sunday,

• Suicide attacks account for most casualties

• Al-Qaeda threatens more bombings

• Tensions in Kirkuk rise after assassinations

there were five suicide bombings within a space of six-hours in Baghdad.

Indications that there will be more suicide bombings has come from a recent statement purportedly issued by the Al Qaeda group in Iraq.

The statement posted on a website used by Islamists has announced the formation of Al-Bara bin Malek brigade, which comprises of suicide bombers.

The statement was issued in the name of Abu Doujana al-Ansari, who claimed he was the head of the new group. Observers, however caution that a larger number of local Iraqis are undertaking suicide attacks when compared to "interna-

tional jihadis" functioning under the Al Qaeda umbrella. Sectarian tensions, involving the Shias, Sunnis and Kurds have sharpened as the new wave of violence has targeted leaders of the three communities at regular intervals.

Gunmen assassinated Ali Abdul-Hussein, the Imam of a Shia mosque in Basra, on Thursday night as part of sectarian killings where dozens of Shia and Sunni clerics have been victims.

Ethnic tensions in the northern Iraqi oil city of Kirkuk, which has a mixed population of Sunnis, Kurds and Turkomans, have also risen sharply following the assassination of the Sunni tribal leader Nayif al-Jubouri. Leading figures of all the three communities were also killed last month.

The Badr brigades-the armed wing of the Shia group, Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI), several armed Sunni groups and the Kurdish Peshmerga fighters have been accused of exacerbating Iraq's ethnic strife

04 JUN 2005

THE HINDU



# IRAQ IN TURMOIL

## Rising Insurgency, Lowering Of Expectations

By HARSH V PANT

*SR 8 16/6 in Am*

The violence in Iraq is at an all-time high. After a brief lull in the immediate aftermath of the 30 January elections in Iraq, insurgency has once again raised its head with a vengeance, dashing US hopes of political stability. In a month since the new cabinet was formed, nearly 700 Iraqis have been slaughtered in car bombings and other bloody attacks, a pace as relentless and heartless as any since the fall of Saddam Hussein more than two years ago.

The attacks, mostly on Iraqi civilians, continue in a relentless wave of violence that the new government of Prime Minister Ibrahim al-Jaafari says it is determined to control but seems powerless to stop. In fact, the situation is so bad that the Prime Minister was forced to extend an emergency law for another 30 days that allows the government to impose curfew and take other steps to preserve law and order.

### Operation Lightning

The Iraqi government is currently undertaking the largest military action led by Iraqis since the American-led invasion two years ago called Operation Lightning. This involves deployment of thousands of troops over the next week in a search-and-arrest operation in Baghdad and it will be extended to the rest of Iraq in a few weeks. The government wants to signal its resolve to effectively tackle the rising menace of insurgency.

There seem to be several reasons for this rise in insurgency. The isolation felt by the Iraqi Sunnis is probably the most important of these factors. The Sunnis, who were ruling Iraq under Saddam Hussein's regime, were suddenly turned into weak and powerless minorities by the US invasion. Moreover, by deciding to boycott Iraq's elections, they made their political isolation complete. And it is this perception of being isolated from political mainstream in Iraq that has manifested itself in rising insurgent activities in the Sunni triangle.

The Bush Administration is increasingly concerned about the Iraqi government's failure to include enough participation by Sunni Muslims and has stepped up its appeal to broaden their role in the government or risk driving moderate Sunnis into the arms of insurgents. Both the US secretary of state and her deputy have visited Iraq in the last few days ostensibly to press this case with Iraq's new government, urging a more convincing effort to reach out to dispossessed Sunni Arab minority.

Despite this, only two mem-

bers of the 55-member committee set up to write Iraq's permanent constitution are Sunni Arabs who constitute 20 per cent of Iraq's population. Tensions between the Sunnis and the Shiites seem to be at an all time high with Sunnis openly accusing Shiite militias of targeting and killing Sunni clerics.

In recent days, Sunni leaders have openly accused the Iraqi Prime Minister and a prominent Shiite militia, known as the Badr Brigade of killing Sunni clerics. The Badr Brigade, formed in the

different motivations and long-term objectives but who share tactics so as to create a sense of instability in Iraq. This includes not only diehard members of the Baath party and pro-Al Qaeda Islamist militants but also those Iraqis who were fired from their jobs in the military and other government institutions for being members of the Baath party but who did not profess any real loyalty for Saddam Hussein's regime. However, at its core, this insurgency is being guided by an alliance between the die-hard



1980s in Iran to oppose Saddam Hussein, has ignored orders to disband and enjoys separate existence from the new Iraq Army and police forces. It is made up of Shiites, to the discomfiture of Sunnis, who they say are singled out in raids and arrests. This campaign of violence has made the threat of civil war in Iraq increasingly tangible.

### Government formation

The slow pace of government formation in Iraq also played into the hands of the disaffected insurgents. The government formation took an inordinate amount of time because of the complex bargaining and negotiations that went into it to satisfy all the political groups and interests. In fact, the US had to cajole the Iraqi government to move faster in its filling up of various cabinet posts and this has still not been fully accomplished. This uncertainty regarding the future shape of the government also gave insurgents an opening that they have used to maximum effect.

In the meantime, the influx of foreign fighters and members of Al-Qaeda has also helped in sustaining the insurgency in Iraq.

The current phase of insurgency is being spearheaded by several groups of people with

Baathists and the network of terrorists under the command of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi.

There are also reports of Syria being the base of operations for foreign fighters and of Syrian militias openly operating in the Sunni triangle. Most of the suicide bombings in Iraq are apparently being undertaken by the foreign fighters. The US military undertook a 1000-man-strong offensive in the western Iraqi desert near the Syrian border to root out insurgents who had been enjoying a safe haven in this region.

Though the US claims that it was a successful operation, its impact will be determined by the pace of insurgency in the coming days. Iraq's government has also called upon its neighbours and especially Syria to help secure Iraq's borders by blocking the infiltration of foreign fighters across the borders into Iraq. The US government has claimed that Syria was the site of a key meeting recently in which Zarqawi lieutenants were ordered to carry out more attacks in Iraq.

Today, Iraq is functioning as virtually three separate political entities with the Kurdish-north and largely Shi'ite-south relatively stable and peaceful. Most of the insurgent activities are located in the centre of Iraq, the

Sunni triangle, which has put the future of entire Iraq at stake.

The result of this mayhem is an Iraq in which about 50 per cent of the population remains unemployed and only a slightly greater percentage have access to clean drinking water, leading to a sharp flagging of Iraqi public confidence.

The progress in developing Iraqi police units cohesive enough to mount an effective challenge to insurgents has also been disappointing. The \$21 billion American-financed reconstruction effort is also moving with fits and start as more than 290 contractors working on American projects have been killed by the insurgents.

### Iran's role

Iran has started flexing its diplomatic muscle by trying to reinforce its ties to Iraq's new Shiite leadership, much to the discomfiture of the US. Iran is more than happy to see US forces bogged down in Iraq even as it is not particularly eager to see a successful, broad-based Shi'ite democracy on its borders. Iran's foreign minister visited Baghdad recently and signed a joint communiqué that publicly acknowledged Iraq as the aggressor in 1980 when it touched off a bloody eight-year war with Iran. This is not likely to be accepted by Iraqi Sunni Arabs and in all likelihood will further inflame Sunni Arab resentments.

There is a new sense of anxiety in Washington with the US military commanders pulling back from their recent suggestions that a major drawdown of 138,000 American troops would become possible by late this year or early in 2006. The US, till a few months back was optimistic that the situation in Iraq was returning to normal and hopes were rising for the withdrawal of US forces from Iraq relatively soon.

Those hopes have faded now as two years after the war and more than three months after national elections that appeared to be a referendum in favour of peace, the violent insurgents remain an unyielding stumbling block in the path to a new Iraq. It is clear that unless the new Iraqi government adopts a serious political strategy to draw away Sunni support from insurgents, a large number of American troops will be stuck fighting a prolonged and bloody counter-insurgency war in large parts of Iraq. And this is extremely disturbing news for the Bush Administration as the public support of the Iraq war is at an all-time low in the US with a majority of Americans feeling, for the first time, that it was not worth all the resources and effort.

# In Iran, N-power a matter of pride



Iranian students chant slogans in front of the French embassy in Teheran to support their government's nuclear programme

By Neil MacFarquhar

**Tehran:** From nuclear negotiators to student dissidents, from bazaar merchants to turbaned mullahs, Iranians agree: the right to develop nuclear power is a point of national pride.

"For a country to have nuclear energy means that it has made progress in all other fields as well, so other countries have to respect its technology," said Nilufar, 29, a student in energy management at the prestigious Sharif Industrial University.

Virtually all supported Iran's defying the West and moving ahead with its uranium enrichment program, which carries the threat of further UN sanctions.

This widespread sense of national pride complicates any attempt to persuade Iran's leaders to give up parts of the nuclear programme, as European negotiators have been trying to prevail upon them to do so over the past few months, offering various incentives.

A month-long UN conference on the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), which Iran has signed, ended on Friday, having failed to address the

kinds of loopholes that the Americans and Europeans fear Iran is using to pursue nuclear weapons under cover of developing nuclear power.

The nuclear standoff also echoes an older fight: Iran's colonial struggle to control its oil resources. Some reach further back, reflecting a desire to revive the glory of ancient Persia.

Others want to claim Iran's future, to prove that the Islamic revolution can overcome its reputation for abysmal management.

"It is a symbolic thing for Iranians," said Mohammad Saeidi, the vice president for planning and international affairs at the Atomic Energy Organisation of Iran. "Our people are very clever, very smart and they want to use all the advanced technology in the world—nuclear technology, biotechnology, Internet technology."

But for all the passion in the air, there are many nuances in Iranian positions, according to Iranian officials, scholars and foreign diplomats.

In fact, they say, Iranian backing for nuclear development indicates neither automatic support for the government nor hostility to the US.

Only a small group, mostly hardcore revolutionaries, wants Iran to resign from the NPT and develop nuclear weapons, they say.

"It would be 100% better to have nuclear weapons, but only to use them against anyone who tried to attack us," said Reza Jaedi, a 24-year-old interviewed in Isfahan who has little sympathy for the government. It is rare to hear such views voiced in Iran, since they contradict the official line that Iran wants the technology only for peaceful means.

Another group opposes nuclear development as too expensive, unnecessary given the vast oil or gas reserves and not worth the international political headache.

But most Iranians, the experts say, fall into two other groups. One believes Iran should use nuclear technology for peaceful purposes.

Another wants Iran to master the nuclear enrichment cycle both to avoid depending on foreign suppliers for nuclear fuel and to be able to move quickly to weapons development if Iran were threatened, either by Israel, the US or a regional rival.

Unquestionably most Iranians would like to find a way to end economic sanctions so the country could use its vast oil wealth—an estimated \$10 billion surplus this year—to fix the country's infrastructure.

Some Iranians interviewed argued that having access to American technology would be worth abandoning the nuclear programme for, but many others say no economic incentives would be enough to persuade Iran to abandon its rights under the treaty. The surplus provides a cushion against outside pressure.

If Iranians were asked whether the mullahs should have missiles, many would say no because that would cement a repressive government's power, say foreign diplomats and scholars. But if asked if Iran should master nuclear technology, most Iranians say it is the country's right under NPT.

It is not hard to find Iranians who can refer directly to Article 4 of NPT, which codifies the signatories' right to develop N-power for peaceful purposes. NYT News Service

## Iran to go nuclear

**Tehran:** Iran's Guardian Council has approved a measure passed by parliament earlier this month requiring the government to develop nuclear technology, including uranium enrichment.

The council's decision on Saturday was reported by the state-run Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting. A spokesman for the council said the body had evaluated the measure and found it not to be unconstitutional. The measure says the government is charged with acquiring technology for peaceful purposes under the framework of the NPT and international law.

An Iranian negotiator said he told Western representatives recently that Iran does not plan to develop nuclear weapons, but sees the successful implementation of N-energy as a path to preserve Iran's security. Agencies

# Rice plays it cool as Iran revives threat

Agence France-Presse

WASHINGTON, May 27. — US Secretary of State Ms Condoleezza Rice has said Iran's decision to keep its uranium enrichment programme suspended after talks with three European Union member countries was a "very positive development." "The Iranians are in a state of suspension right now, which is a good thing," Ms Rice told the Bloomberg news agency yesterday, according to a state department transcript of the interview.

"What the EU-3 did in holding to the Paris agreement, of holding to the insistence on a suspension, on holding to objective guarantees as the outcome, which we believe has got to be a permanent cessation of the sensitive activities associated with the nuclear fuel cycle, is a very positive development," she added.

On Wednesday, Iran and Europe's three negotiating nations — Britain, Germany and France — agreed in

Geneva to keep up talks over Tehran's nuclear programme, and Iran pledged to maintain suspension of its uranium enrichment programme agreed in Paris last November.

Reports from Tehran have it that Iran is still examining the EU's latest offer to solve a dispute over its nuclear programme and could yet resume uranium conversion if it rejects the new proposal, Tehran's top atomic official has said today.

"We will restart (work at the) the Isfahan (uranium) conversion plant, and the fuel cycle is our (non-negotiable) red line," Mr Hassan Rowhani said, replying to a question on what will happen if Iran refuses to accept the EU plan.

"Since the European proposal was a new one and it is up to the regime's officials to make a decision, we brought it to Tehran. If not accepted we will begin enrichment in Isfahan," he added, quoted by the IRNA news agency.

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28 MAY 2005

THE STATESMAN

# Iraq to launch massive crackdown on resistance fighters in Baghdad

Interior Minister confirms Al-Zarqawi has been wounded

Atul Aneja

**MANAMA:** The Iraqi Interior Ministry has claimed that it has earmarked a 40,000 strong security force for a crackdown on guerilla fighters in Baghdad following an offensive by anti-occupation forces this month in which 600 persons including American troops, government officials and civilians have been killed.

The Iraqi Interior Minister, Saadoun al-Dulaimi said that a composite new force would draw troops from the Interior and Defence ministries, and will launch an offensive soon.

With the guerillas recently stepping up the tempo to seize the initiative, the Iraqi Government has been making bold statements including a confirmation of earlier claims that the Al-Qaeda head in Iraq, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, had been wounded.

The Iraqi Interior Minister Bayan Jabor replied in the affirmative when asked whether Al-Zarqawi had been injured. "Yes it is true," Mr. Jabor said when asked about a statement posted on an Islamist website. The Minister said that Al-Zarqawi had been wounded five days ago.

Al-Zarqawi's reported injury has unleashed a propaganda war on the Internet, with purported Islamist websites making stunning claims and counterclaims. A little known website had earlier issued a statement identifying Abu Hafs al-Qarni, as Al-Zarqawi's interim successor till the time he recovered from his wounds. But the claim has been denied by another better known website that is known to have carried Al-Qaeda messages in the past.

Elaborating on his security plan for Baghdad, Mr. Al-Dulaimi said that the capital would be divided into 17 districts where the guerillas would be tackled separately. Besides, Baghdad would be completely blockaded so that infiltration into the capital can be prevented. The Bagh-



**DEATH AND DESTRUCTION:** An Iraqi policeman inspects the wreckage of a car bomb which exploded near a police patrol in Baghdad on Thursday, killing three policemen and two civilians, and wounding 17. - PHOTO: AP

dad security plan would also be applied in other violence-racked cities. There have been recent reports suggesting that the re-

sistance has been "decentralised" and revolves around a network of cells that have been embedded inside the most con-

gested parts of Iraqi towns and cities, including Baghdad. Analysts say that this has set the stage for a classic urban guerilla war.

27 MAY 2005

THE HINDU

# Iran, EU in crisis talks on Iran nuclear plans

PARISA HAFEZI  
GENEVA, MAY 25

THE European Union and Iran began make-or-break talks on Wednesday where failure could mean Tehran being sent down the road toward UN sanctions over suspicions it is trying to make a nuclear bomb.

Ahead of the talks, Iran ruled out a compromise, saying it would stick to its decision to resume sensitive nuclear activities. The EU says if Tehran goes through with that, it will back US calls to haul Iran before the UN Security Council.

"Today is the final stage of the talks," said Sirus Naseri, a senior Iranian negotiator. "The Europeans know it is decision-making time," he said.

Iran says its nuclear programme is purely for generating electricity. But the US says Iran is using the programme as a veil to develop atomic weapons.

Iran says it has decided to restart converting small quan-

tities of raw uranium into gas at a plant in central Iran, although it has not said when. This is the first step to enriching uranium which can then be used for power or weapons.

Foreign Ministers of Britain, France and Germany were to press Iran's chief nuclear negotiator Hassan Rohani at the Geneva meeting to stick to the deal. "Rohani will meet a pretty united message from the EU3 that if Iran re-starts it will be serious and the agreement will suffer," said an EU3 diplomat.

"Reaching an understanding so that we can restart our work with their (Europeans') agreement is in everyone's interests," said Iranian President Mohammad Khatami in Tehran. "But if our friends cannot reach an agreement, then we will definitely carry out our decision anyway."

One possible solution floated has been for Russia to enrich uranium for Iran, but neither side has said whether it could be acceptable. —Reuters

20 MAY 2005

INDIAN EXPRESS

# Baghdad: Car bombs kill 3 US troops

ANDREW MARSHALL  
BAGHDAD, MAY 24

INSURGENTS killed three US soldiers and two Iraqis in car bomb attacks in central Baghdad on Tuesday, a day after a wave of suicide attacks and bomb blasts that killed at least 56 Iraqis.

The US 3rd Infantry Division said the three soldiers were killed when a car bomb exploded next to their patrol. Earlier, a car bomb was detonated beside an Iraqi police convoy, killing at least two people and wounding eight, police said.

Since the US-led invasion in March 2003, at least 1,630 US military and Pentagon personnel have lost their lives in Iraq. Guerrilla attacks have also killed thousands of Iraqi police, soldiers and civilians.

On Monday, a car bomb exploded outside a Shi'ite mosque in the lawless 'triangle of death' area just South of Baghdad, killing at least 21 people, the Defence ministry said. Many of those killed and wounded were children.

The Defence Ministry said the suicide bomber had been identified as a Sudanese national.

Attacks on Shi'ite mosques and tit-for-tat killings of Shi'ite and Sunni clerics have inflamed sectarian divisions and raised concerns that Iraq could be sliding towards civil war.

In another attack on Monday, two suicide car bombs exploded in the northern town of Tal Afar near the house of Hasan Bagdash, a Shi'ite Turkmen leader. Bagdash



An Iraqi policeman inspects a vehicle destroyed in a suicide car bomb attack in Baghdad on Tuesday. Reuters

survived but the US military said at least 15 people were killed. It was the second apparent assassination attempt on Bagdash in two days.

In Tuz Khurmatu, South of the oil city of Kirkuk, a suicide truck bomb exploded, killing five people. In Samarra, a stronghold of Sunni Arab insurgents, two suicide bombers—one in a car and one on foot—blew themselves up outside a US base. Four Iraqis were killed and four US soldiers wounded.

The upsurge in violence in Iraq has sparked a confrontation between the Muslim Clerics Association,

an influential Sunni Arab group, and the Badr organisation, the armed wing of the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq, one of the main parties in the Shi'ite alliance that won the January 30 polls.

The Muslim Clerics Association has accused Badr militiamen of being behind the recent killings of some Sunni Arab clerics. Badr leaders denied the charge. Radical Shi'ite cleric Moqtada al-Sadr, who has led two uprisings against US-led troops, says he is in talks with all sides to try to mediate. —Reuters

## Straw condemns photos of Saddam in underwear

■ LONDON: British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw on Tuesday condemned the publication of photos showing former Iraqi President Saddam Hussein in his prison cell clad only in his underwear, saying such material intended to "humiliate".

"It looks as though this was in breach of rules. I think it is being investigated," Straw said. "I am not in favour of publication of material like that which serves to humiliate people, even if they are in prison, even if they are accused of unacceptable crimes." Straw was speaking after talks in London with Kuwait's Foreign Minister Sheikh Mohammed al-Sabah. He expressed concern at the fuss over the pictures of the Iraqi dictator, who was in power when Iraq invaded Kuwait in 1990.

"In Kuwait, when this publication came out, we had just buried five of our people who we brought back from mass graves in Iraq," Sheikh Mohammad said.

"We really do not understand this fascination with the colour of Saddam's underwear while ignoring the horrendous crimes he committed against his people and his neighbours." Last Friday, *The Sun* ran a front-page cover showing a bare-chested Saddam in his underwear. —AFP/PTI

25 MAY 2005

INDIAN EXPRESS

# Sun publishes new pics, Saddam threatens lawsuit

**VIJAY Dutt**  
London, May 21

THE SUN published more pictures of Saddam Hussein and other high-security prisoners on Saturday despite the threat of a million-pound lawsuit from Saddam's lawyers and reports of a "thorough and aggressive" military investigation — backed by President Bush — by the US into sources who could have leaked the pictures to the daily.

Ziyad Khasawneh, head of Saddam's international defence team, said they would sue the paper and also take legal action against the US government, particularly against Donald Rumsfeld. "We have decided to sue the newspaper and those who gave the pictures to the paper."

"They (pic) were taken in jail and President Saddam is with the American forces so the principal authority lies with Rumsfeld... I phoned London... to bring legal action. Publishing these pictures is against the Geneva Convention and international law."

## PICTURE IMPERFECT

Emmanuel Ludot, Saddam's French lawyer, confirmed from Paris that he would sue the daily for a million pounds. The lawsuits, he added, were being planned in the countries where the paper is sold. Ludot also accused the US of being behind the publication, alleging it could not be a coincidence that a camera was allowed into Saddam's heavily guarded prison. "I think it's a strategy orchestrated by the Americans to destroy the image of President Saddam Hussein — and to say 'look at this man, he's not a god, he's only a man... He's a prisoner, he is our prey, it's not worth it to still believe in him,'" he said.

The allegations against the US came despite the report that the US military launched a "thorough and aggressive" investigation, which the White House said was strongly supported by President Bush. Investigators believe that the pictures may be up to a year old and they are checking the

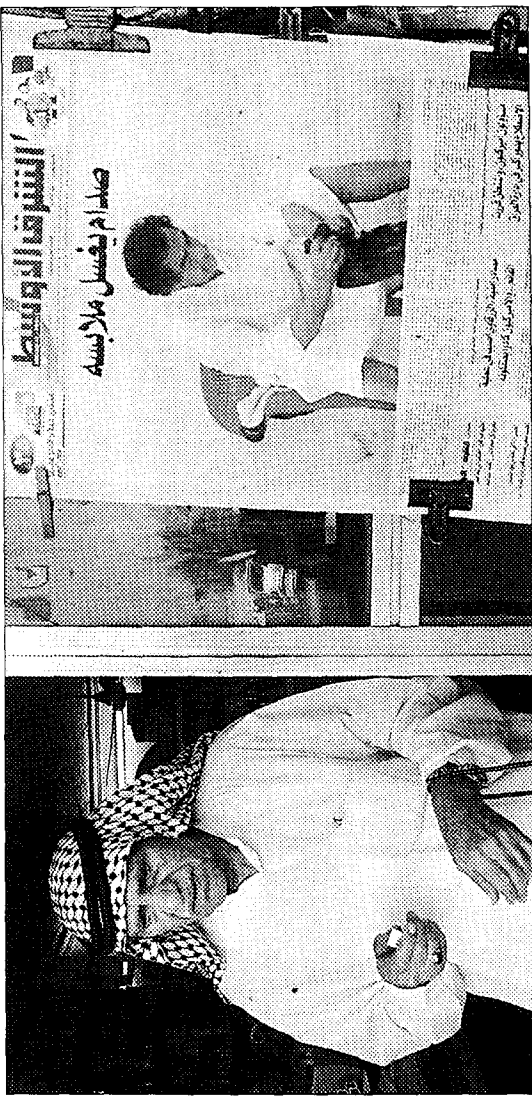
names of soldiers and military police who could have access to Saddam Hussein.

Washington and London agree that the pictures' publication threatened to inflame anti-American sentiment among Sunnis in Iraq. The front page of the *Sun* with Saddam's photograph in underpants while folding his pair of trousers was shown on several Arab television channels although al-Jazeera refrained "for moral reasons".

Saddam's legal team, the Pentagon and the International Committee of the Red Cross all agreed that the photographs possibly breached the Geneva Convention, which protects the privacy and dignity of prisoners of war. But the *Sun* is unrepentant.

Managing editor Graham Dudman is proud of the scoop. "This is a man (Saddam) has murdered a minimum of 300,000 people and we're supposed to feel sorry for him because someone's taken his picture?" he said.

"He's not been mistreated. He's washing his trousers. This is the modern-day Adolf Hitler. Please don't ask us to feel sorry."



An Iraqi walks past a store displaying the Saturday edition of the *Ashraq al-Awsat* newspaper, with a photo of Saddam Hussein washing clothes, in Baghdad. The photo was originally published in Friday's *Sun*.

AP

# Legal row over Saddam pictures

Breach of Geneva convention on prisoner rights, says U.S. 22/5

Hasan Suroor

**LONDON:** The Sun newspaper is facing threat of legal action for \$1 million for publishing photographs showing the former Iraqi President, Saddam Hussein, in "degrading" circumstances in his prison cell, said to be "somewhere near Baghdad".

Even as Mr. Hussein's defence lawyers threatened to sue the tabloid, and U.S. President George W. Bush joined in the condemnation, a defiant Sun published more photographs on Saturday describing them as "fantastic" and "iconic" news pictures.

"I defy any newspaper, magazine or television station who were presented with them not to have published," its managing editor Graham Dudman said. He

insisted that the photographs did not show Mr. Hussein being mistreated.

"He's not mistreated. He's washing his trousers.....Please don't ask us to feel sorry for him," he added.

## Investigation

American military authorities claimed that the pictures, in which Mr. Hussein is seen stripped to his waist and washing his own clothes, were in breach of the Geneva Convention on prisoners' rights.

They said they planned to launch an investigation into how the photographs got out.

Arab commentators feared that the photographs were likely to inflame passions among Mr. Hussein's supporters and further fuel the anti-U.S. mood

which last week erupted into riots in many Muslim countries following a Newsweek report (since retracted) alleging desecration of Koran by U.S. soldiers in Guantanamo Bay.

Ziyad Khasawneh, a senior member of Mr. Hussein's defence team, was quoted as saying that it had decided to sue *The Sun* as well as those who might have given it the photographs.

"Publishing these pictures...is a devaluation of the dignity of human rights and against the Geneva Convention and international law," he said.

*The Sun* said it was ready to face any legal action and published photographs of several other high-profile members of the Saddam regime, now in prison, including that of "Chemical Ali".

22 MAY 2005

THE HINDU



# Saddam pictures anger US

London, May 20 (Reuters) — Washington promised an investigation today into how pictures of Saddam Hussein in his underpants were splashed across the front-page of Britain's biggest-selling daily newspaper.

The imprisoned former Iraqi leader appeared on the front of *The Sun*, naked except for a pair of white briefs and holding a pair of trousers in his hand. *The Sun* quoted US military sources as saying they had handed over the pictures "in the hope of dealing a body blow to the resistance in Iraq". Other photographs showed Saddam, with short, dyed-black hair and a moustache, washing clothes by hand and asleep on his bed.

The photos later appeared in the *New York Post*. Both papers are owned by Australian media baron Rupert Murdoch.

The Pentagon said their release was unauthorised and opened a probe to find who did it. The photos, which the Pentagon believed, were taken more than a year ago. They contravened Saddam's rights as a prisoner and could have broken the Geneva Convention, the Pentagon said.

"Multi-National Forces-Iraq is disappointed at the possibility that someone responsible for the security, welfare, and detention of Saddam would take and provide these photos for public release," a Pentagon statement said.

The White House said President George W. Bush had been told of the pictures and "strongly supports the aggressive and thorough investigation that is already underway." Saddam's lawyers expressed outrage.

"In our opinion this is a violation of all international agreements and human dignity, therefore, we must sue the people responsible and the providers of these pictures, because if you look closely you can see that they were taken from his prison cell," lawyer Ziad Khasawneh of Saddam's defence team said.

"This is considered as another Abu Ghraib and we will take the necessary legal actions," he said in Amman.



The Saddam Hussein picture as it appeared on *The Sun* tabloid's front page in London. (Reuters)

21 MAY 2005

THE TELEGRAPH

FROM WASHINGTON POST

# Iran may agree to nuclear talks

DAFNA LINZER

WASHINGTON, MAY 13

CONFRONTED with significant international pressure, Iran signaled on Friday that it was prepared to give negotiations a try before making a final decision about resuming its nuclear program and responded positively to a European offer of a meeting to reduce tensions, US, European and Iranian diplomats said.

But the crisis over Iran's nuclear efforts was at a sensitive stage, and diplomats on both sides of the Atlantic said they were uncertain whether there was enough common ground for a meeting to take place between Iranian and European officials. US and European diplomats, who discussed the issue on condition of anonymity, described clear red lines, saying the only way out of the escalation would be a retreat by Iran from plans to quickly restart a uranium conversion facility at Isfahan.

If that doesn't happen, Prime Minister Tony Blair said on Friday that Britain would support US efforts to involve the United Nations Security Council in the dispute. "We certainly will support referral to the UN Security Council if Iran breaches its undertakings and obligations," Blair said.

Away from cameras, U.S. officials began mapping scenarios for a possible emergency session of the IAEA next week to discuss Iran. A US official involved in the policy-making said the administration wants to have a strategy in place when British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw arrives in Washington for talks Tuesday. —LAT/WP

14 MAY 2005

14 MAY 2005

INDIAN EXPRESS

# 59 killed, many wounded in suicide bombings across Iraq

W. Asia  
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 12/5

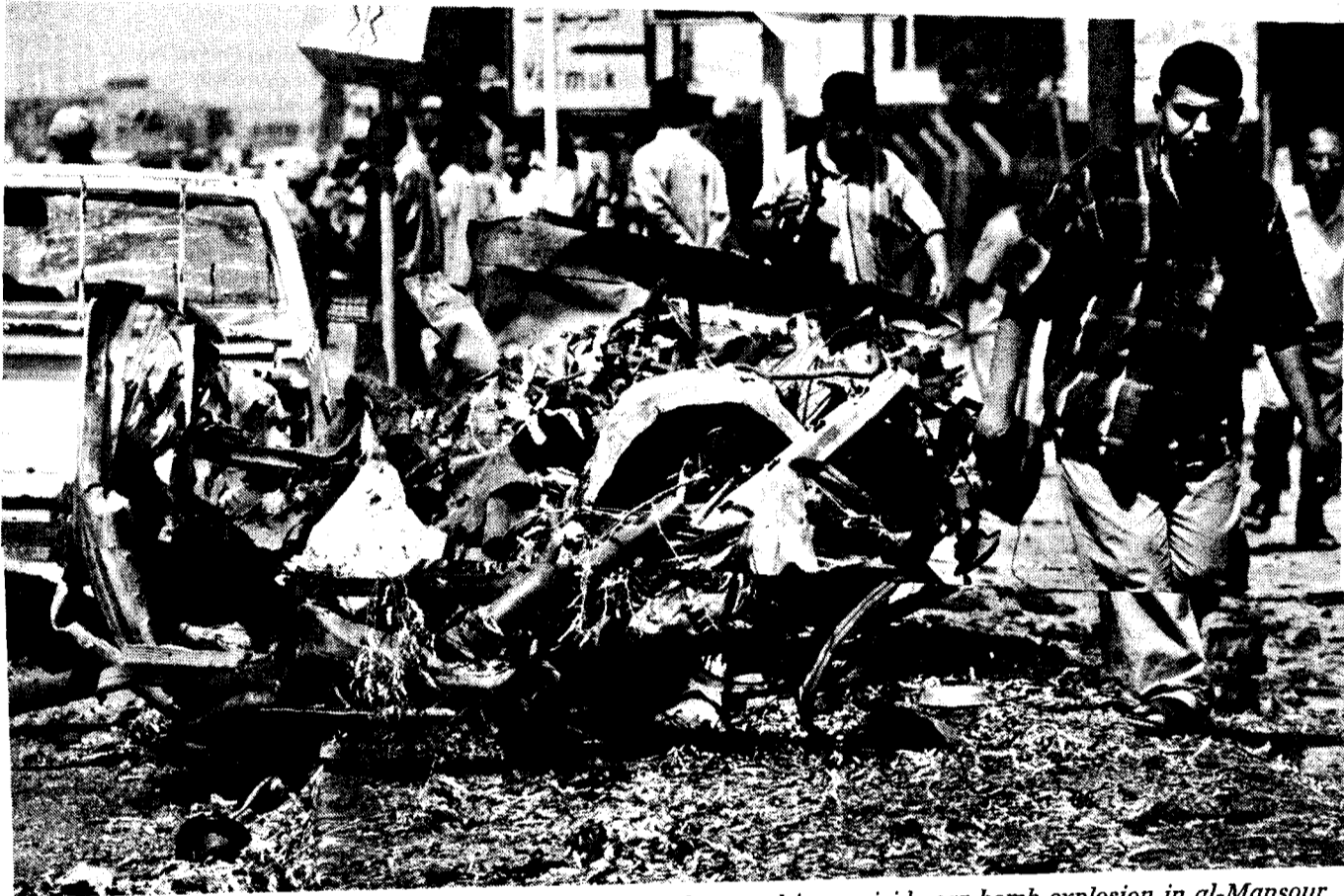
Tikrit blast area was full of Shia migrant workers at the time of the attack

- Car bomb explodes in a crowded market in Tikrit, killing 27
- Twenty killed when suicide bomber on foot strikes in Hawija
- At least four explosions rock Baghdad
- Surging violence follows U.S. claims that 100 guerillas have been killed

Atul Aneja

**MANAMA:** Persisting with attacks that were launched two weeks ago, Iraqi guerillas have killed at least 59 people in a series of suicide bombings that have targeted separate locations north of Baghdad. An estimated 27 persons died when a suicide bomber exploded his car packed with explosives in a crowded market in Tikrit, 175 km north of Baghdad. The blast took place close to a police station, but it was not clear whether the building was the target.

Militants have frequently struck religious and ethnic groups, and the market place was full of Shia migrant workers at the time of the attack. The bombings follow claims by the U.S. that its forces had killed 100 guerillas in a sweeping assault close to Syria's border with Iraq. The sharp escalation in a fortnight of violence that has claimed nearly 400 lives also negates the earlier anticipation that the appointment of the new Government in Iraq would deflate the armed resistance to the two-year old American occupation. In the second attack, a suicide bomber, with explosives strapped to his body targeted would be recruits to the army, in the town of Hawija, close to the northern Iraqi oil city of Kirkuk.



**BLITZ OF ATTACKS:** Civilians check the wreckage of a car destroyed in a suicide car bomb explosion in al-Mansour district west of Baghdad on Wednesday. - PHOTO: AFP

At least 20 persons were killed and scores wounded in the strike. The assailant had apparently first mingled with the crowd that had queued up at the recruitment centre before detonating his explosives.

### Pools of blood

Eyewitnesses close to the scene of the attack said that the area was covered with pools of blood, dead bodies and body parts. Baghdad has also been rocked by at least four blasts, including a car bombing, which killed three persons and injured

at least eight. It included a roadside bombing of a police patrol in the upmarket Mansour district.

Two high profile kidnappings of an Australian and a Japanese national have accompanied surging violence in Iraq. The captors of an Australian hostage Douglas Wood had set a Tuesday deadline for the withdrawal of all Australian forces from Iraq as a precondition for his release. The Army of Ansar Al-Sunna, which is one of the most feared guerilla groups in Iraq, has been holding Akihiko Saito, a Japanese, since Sunday evening.

## More U.S. funds cleared

Sridhar Krishnaswami

**WASHINGTON:** U.S. Congress has approved yet another emergency supplemental funding for Iraq and Afghanistan. The Senate gave its approval unanimously for an additional \$82 billions on Tuesday. The House last week approved the measure overwhelmingly. Of

the fund, \$76 billions will go to the Pentagon for replacement of material, ammunition and missiles and to increase the death benefits for families of soldiers killed in active duty. The emergency supplemental also includes \$900 millions for tsunami relief and another \$592 millions for a new American embassy in Baghdad.

# Iraq plunging into sectarian violence

The emergence of a number of power centres, many of which operate with American help, could set in motion a long-drawn civil war.

Atul Aneja

THE EMERGENCE of a new Shia-dominated government led by Prime Minister Ibrahim Jaafari has opened Iraq's sectarian wounds. In the days since Mr. Jaafari announced a partial Cabinet line-up, violence has escalated. Suicide bombers, some driving cars laden with explosives or on foot, launched a spate of attacks, killing more than 200 people and wounding hundreds more. Sunni groups, who have spearheaded the Iraqi resistance but have found themselves marginalised from mainstream politics, have been blamed.

The new wave of violence has shown a pattern, reflecting the power equations that lock Iraq's many religious and ethnic groups.

## Kurds new targets

Shia bodies have been frequently targeted in the past, but Kurds have borne the brunt in the recent attacks. Marginalised for centuries, Shias and Kurds have established a political alliance that dominates the new government, effectively displacing from the core Sunnis who have historically ruled Iraq.

On May 1, in Talafar — a city close to the Syrian border — a suicide bomber ploughed his car into a tent filled with mourners gathered for the funeral of a slain Kurdish leader. About 30 persons were killed and another 50 wounded. Kurdish officials said gunmen prevented ambulances from taking the victims to hospital, resulting in street battles.

Three days later, a suicide bomber on foot attacked Kurds queuing up outside the office of the Kurdish Democratic Party, which doubled as a police recruitment centre, in the northern Iraqi city of Irbil. Around 60 people were killed in the strike, the worst attack after February 28, when 110 would-be recruits were killed outside a clinic in the city of Hilla. Relations between Kurds and Sunni Arabs are already on edge, especially in the northern oil city of Kirkuk. The Kurds have claimed Kirkuk as theirs, but this has been contested by Sunni Arabs, settled in the area in large numbers by the Baathist government of the former President, Saddam Hussein. The latest attacks are expected to deepen tensions between the two communities and are likely to encourage Kurds to bid for an independent Kurdistan.

## Sunnis' resistance

Sunni groups known to be close to the resistance have expressed their distrust in the new Shia-led government of Mr. Jaafari. "We don't believe that the government will



**VIOLENCE UNABATED:** U.S. and Iraqi soldiers at the scene of a car bomb explosion at a crowded market in Suwayrah, 50 km south of Baghdad, on Saturday. — AFP

solve the problems of an occupied Iraq. We don't trust the government," Harith al-Dhatri, head of the Association of Muslim Scholars, a powerful Sunni organisation known to be close to the resistance, was quoted as saying.

Latent Sunni-Shia tensions have now spilled into the open. On May 4, rioting broke out between Shia and Sunni students on the Baghdad University campus after the killing of a Shia student leader. Gunmen killed Masar Sarhan, a 24-year-old, after he had invited students for celebrations inside the campus following the appointment of a new cabinet by Mr. Jaafari.

The unrest could now spread to other campuses as many Shia students have called for avenging Sarhan's death.

The emergence of a spate of armed militias and groups, including many controlled by the Americans, operating from Baghdad's

high security Green Zone, has added an ominous new dimension to Iraq's sectarian politics. Among them, the Special Police Commandos with at least 10,000 men has acquired a high profile. The group is known for exercising the "Salvador option" — a policy of targeted high-profile assassinations practised by U.S.-trained death squads in El Salvador. It is led by Adnan Thavit al-Samarrai, a loyalist of former interim Prime Minister Iyad Allawi. In 1996, he was part of a group that made an aborted coup attempt to topple Mr. Hussein's Government.

Two other militias under Mr. Allawi are the Muthana Brigade and the Defenders of Khadamiya. While Mr. Allawi is not part of the new government, he is likely to play his part as a powerful American-backed power centre.

The U.S. Marines have nurtured the Iraqi Freedom Guard and the Freedom Fighters.

These militias include a large number of Shias from the south, and have been deployed against Sunnis in the troubled Anbar province, the epicentre of the resistance.

The Americans have also been manoeuvring the Kurdish Peshmerga fighters, who reportedly fought the Sunnis in Fallujah during the American-led assault on the city in November.

Outside the U.S. fold, the Mehdi army of Shia leader Moqtada Al-Sadr controls the streets in many Shia strongholds and helps provide *de facto* local level administration. The southern Iraqi city of Basra is a new stronghold that Shia militias now control.

The emergence of a number of power centres, many of which operate with American help, has provided Iraq with the ingredients that could set in motion a long-drawn civil war.

09 MAY 2005

THE HINDU

# Sunni setback to Iraq cabinet

Baghdad, May 8 (Reuters): Iraq's parliament approved six new ministers today hoping to fill the political void that has stoked the insurgency, but one minister turned down the job, leaving the cabinet still incomplete three months after polls.

Prime Minister Ibrahim Jaafari had announced the cabinet was complete after months of bickering to agree on the balance of power between competing sectarian and ethnic blocs, and vowed to crack down on an escalating insurgency.

But proposed human rights minister Hisham al-Shibli said he had been picked purely to placate Iraq's restive Sunni Arab minority, and said he was rejecting the post.

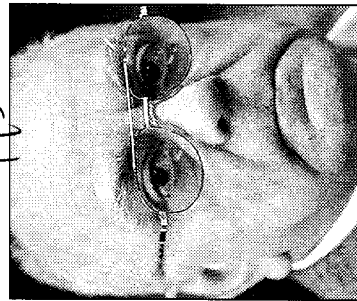
"This post was given to me without anyone consulting me. I was surprised when they nominated me. It was just be-

cause I am a Sunni," he said. "This is something I reject completely. I am a democratic figure ... and I am completely against sectarianism."

The Sunni Arab minority dominated Iraq during Saddam Hussein's rule but was sidelined after the elections, when most Sunni Arabs stayed away from the polls due to a boycott and fears of insurgent violence. There are only 17 Sunni Arab lawmakers in the 275-member parliament.

Wary of fuelling sectarian and ethnic tension and determined to defeat an insurgency dominated by Sunni Arab guerrillas, the Shia and Kurdish blocs that dominate parliament pledged to include several Sunni Arabs in their cabinet.

The confusion over the human rights portfolio is the latest embarrassment for Iraq's leaders, who have infu-



**Hisham al-Shibli, who turned down the post of human rights minister, (AFP)**

riated many Iraqis by taking so long to agree a cabinet.

Other appointments announced today included the important defence and oil ministries.

Saadoun al-Dulaimi, a Sunni Arab former military

officer with tribal ties to Iraq's rebellious western Anbar province, was named defence minister. The government hopes that putting a Sunni Arab in the post will help determine the insurgency.

A Sunni Arab was also appointed to the industry ministry, and a Sunni Arab deputy prime minister was named to join Shia and Kurdish deputies already appointed.

A respected Shia official, Ibrahim Bahr al-Uloum, was named oil minister, a key post in the oil-rich nation.

"Our new motto in the ministry is fight corruption and boost production," Bahr al-Uloum told a news conference.

Jaafari had hoped that with a new cabinet fully in place, he would press ahead with efforts to defeat the insurgency. "We will take all neces-

sary steps to fight this monstrous phenomenon," he said.

But the debacle over the human rights post underlines the divisions in government that have hampered efforts to tackle violence. Insurgent attacks escalated over the past 10 days, with at least 300 people killed in suicide attacks and bombings.

Gunmen assassinated senior transport ministry official Zobaa Yassin as he drove to work today, police said.

Yesterday, al Qaida's network in Iraq hit a foreign security convoy with a car bomb in the heart of Baghdad, killing at least 22 people including two Americans, Brandon Thomas and Todd Venette, who worked for CTU Consulting.

The security firm said five of its employees were also wounded by two suicide car bombers.

# Iraqi govt sworn in

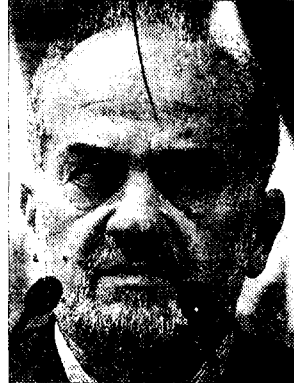
Patrick Cockburn  
in Amman

May 3. — The deep divisions between Iraq's communities were in glaring evidence today when its first democratic government was sworn in, with several important posts still unfilled.

The Cabinet led by Mr Ibrahim al-Jaafari was sworn in at a ceremony inside the Green Zone in Baghdad which is heavily fortified and defended by US troops. But no permanent ministers were named to the key oil, defence, electricity, industry or human rights ministries.

There was no sign of Sheikh Ghazi al-Yawer, the Sunni former President who is now Vice-President, who may have been boycotting the ceremony because of the failure of the Sunnis to get the jobs they want. Many members of the National Assembly did not turn up at the swearing in.

The Shi'ite coalition is willing to give the defence ministry to a Sunni but negotiators have failed to agree who should have the post. The Shi'ites want a measure of control over security and have already



Divisions among the constituents would make it difficult for Prime Minister Mr Al-Jaafari to exercise much control over his Cabinet

appointed one their supporters to the interior ministry.

The three months it has taken since the election of 30 January to produce a government, even one in which several ministries have not been filled, shows the suspicion with which the Shi'ite, Kurdish and Sunni communities regard each other. The new government is likely to be a weak one with Mr Al-Jaafari unable to exercise control over his Cabinet or even the ministers from the United Iraqi Alliance, the Shi'ite coalition, of which his Dawa party is a member. — **The Independent**

04 MAY 2005

THE STATESMAN

# Iraq's deepening sectarianism

Handwritten scribbles and marks in the top right corner.

Two years ago Shia and Sunni lived happily alongside each other. Now they are divided by fear and hatred.

Ghaith Abdul-Ahad

ONE WARM afternoon a few weeks ago, outside the Baghdad headquarters of Sciri, the main Shia political party, dozens of bearded militiamen were milling around, automatic weapons dangling from their shoulders. Some stood in watchtowers, others, wearing flip-flops, ferried big trays of food. Black banners and posters of the imams hung on the big concrete blast walls. The whole scene had a very strong scent of a neighbouring country.

A woman shrouded in a black chador stood at the gate talking to a middle-aged bearded man dressed from head to toe in black. The woman, a high-school teacher in one of Baghdad's Shia-Sunni southern neighbourhoods, had a matter of grave concern to report to her party official: "I tell you, my brother, all the staff in the directorate of education in Dura are Sunnis and they are all terrorists under their cloaks, Ba'athists, Saddamists."

"By God, all those Ba'athists will be decapitated," said the man as he wrote something in a notebook.

"I will tell his eminence and I am sure he will do something about it."

Another day, another part of town: at the interior ministry's commando base, a general and a few of his intelligence officers and brigade commanders, some in pyjamas, others in uniform, sat around a small desk late at night. They were planning a couple of raids for later that night when an excited young man came in. "Sir, we have very reliable information that a would-be suicide bomber is sitting in his house, explosives wrapped around his body, waiting to detonate himself in a Shia mosque in the morning. He is a Sunni from Sammara, sir."

A unit was dispatched and broke into the house of the would-be-bomber — a young university student — and he and his brother were arrested. No explosives were found, but it was confirmed that he was a Sunni.

In Saydiya, another of Baghdad's mixed Sunni-Shia neighbourhoods, Um-Omar, an Iraqi woman in her late 50s lives with several grown-up children. At the end of their street are the ruins of the local police station and the city council administrative building. "The Mujahideens of the Resistance" had blown them up, said Um-Omar. But she was less concerned about insurgent activity

than the possibility of her sons being detained during one of the frequent American raids. She thinks neighbours might inform on them: "There are lots of Shia in our area, and you know how the Shia hate the Sunnis."

No, I didn't know that. Two years ago, the day after Saddam's statue was toppled in Baghdad, I was quoted by a journalist on the London-based *Guardian* newspaper as saying: "There is no line dividing the Sunni and Shia in Iraq." But two years later, these lines are getting deeper every day. With every car bomb targeting Shia mosques, with every slaying of a Shia pilgrim passing through Sunni land, with every Sunni man killed or arrested by mistake because he looked like an insurgent, the lines become enshrined in our politics and in our daily life.

Before entering into conversation with anyone in Baghdad these days, you should sniff for any funny smells. Your eyes and ears should be wide open, following every single detail, from the way "the suspect" dresses to his or her accent. You look deep for clues — what kind of pictures are on the wall? Is there a *jihadi* verse stuck on the car window? What kind of divine creature is being used in the conversation? Is it Imam Ali or Hussein, the Prophet, God or Bin Laden?

A good Iraqi shouldn't take more than five minutes to come up with a whole data sheet on the suspect's background information: religion, sect, ethnicity, political affiliation. Then you can start on stage two: what tribe are they from? Once you have established these facts, you can start your conversation.

Sectarian lines are dividing the whole city. Shia militiamen are now effectively providing security in Baghdad's main Shia districts. Shia vigilante groups are securing mosques and schools against insurgent attacks from Sunni neighbours. Drivers going through Sunni areas empty their cars of religious books and pictures, fearing insurgent checkpoints.

It's not Beirut yet — we are still short of snipers' alleys and "green lines" dividing the city, but people are aware of the new sectarian boundaries. It sounds like fiction when you remind Baghdadis that not so long ago they used to drive from one part of the town to another in search of a perfect kebab. — ©Guardian Newspapers Limited 2005

04 MAY 2005 THE HINDU

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# 30 Iraqi rebels charge checkpoint, 5 cops killed

h Atiq  
Jaww

**Baghdad:** Five Iraqi policemen were shot dead early today when some 30 insurgents attacked their checkpoint, on a main road leading south out of Baghdad, an interior ministry official said.

"The policemen were taken by surprise at about 6:00 am (0730 IST) at their checkpoint some 20 km south of Baghdad by armed men who shot them and took their weapons," the official said. The policemen might have been sleeping, he added.

Insurgents shot dead five Iraqi policemen at a checkpoint and a car bomb killed four people in Baghdad on Sunday, underscoring the dire security situation on the third day of violence since a new government was formed.

The shooting attack near a military college serving as a US military camp reinforced concerns that US trained Iraqi forces still have a long way to go before they can take over security from American soldiers.

At least four civilians were killed and five wounded when a car bomb targeted a US military convoy near a technical college in the capital, police said. There was no word from the US military on whether any US troops were hurt.

In the three days since Iraq announced the formation of a government — after three months of negotiations — insurgents have carried out a furious sequence of bombings, including more than 15 car bomb blasts in Baghdad, killing dozens.

Iraqi officials say militants have capitalised on the months of political haggling over the government's formation to step up their attacks in a campaign that

has erased much of the optimism created by the Jan 30 elections.

The political squabbling and renewed violence also appear to have fuelled sectarian tensions, with politicians struggling to balance the interests of Shiites and Kurds, who are the new powers, and the Sunnis who dominated Iraq under Saddam Hussein.

dreds of insurgents in Falluja, a former rebel stronghold, and destroyed the nerve centre of the guerrillas. Since then, militants have taken operations elsewhere.

## Mass Grave

South of Baghdad, forensic experts are investigating a mass



Iraqi police and civilians survey a crater created by the car bomb

While most of the violence in the past three days has focused on the capital and nearby areas, there are still attacks in the country's traditional hotspots.

Guerrillas fired at least seven rockets into the city of Falluja on Saturday, killing three Iraqi civilians and wounding another, the US military said.

A US led military offensive in November killed or captured hun-

dreds of insurgents in Falluja, a former rebel stronghold, and destroyed the nerve centre of the guerrillas. Since then, militants have taken operations elsewhere.

grave thought to contain the remains of as many as 1,500 Kurds killed in the 1980s. The grave, with 18 trenches, is in Samawa, along the Euphrates River. "We know they're Kurdish victims because of the clothing and artifacts that were found with the bodies," said Gregg Nivala, an attorney with the Department of Justice's Regime Crimes Liaison Office. Reuters

02 MAY 2005

THE TIMES OF INDIA



# Iraq coronation in terror

**Baghdad, April 29 (Reuters):** A string of car bombs killed at least 24 people in Iraq today, ramming home to the new government in Baghdad that insurgents are as strong as ever.

Nine car bombs targeted Iraqi security forces in Baghdad and the nearby town of Madaen, a bloody display of capabilities one day after a new government was formed. The top US general said this week the rebels were as strong as they were a year ago.

Eighty-nine people, mostly police and National Guardsmen, were also wounded, underscoring the security challenge facing Iraq's new leaders after three months of post-election wrangling that appears to have emboldened the insurgency.

Hours after four bombs killed at least 13 people in the Aadhamiya district of the capital, insurgents struck in the New Baghdad area, killing two people with the increasingly common tactic of following one strike with another. After a first car bomb hit a National Guard convoy, police who had gathered at the scene were struck by a second car bomb.

In a pattern of violence that has raised concerns over sectarian tensions, insurgents also struck in the town of Madaen, where police say tit-for-tat kidnappings and killings between Shias and



A soldier holds the headband of a civilian who was killed in a car bomb explosion in Baghdad's northern district of Adhamiya. (AFP)

insurgents are just as capable as they were one year ago and were mounting up to 60 attacks a day.

The 275-seat parliament voted overwhelmingly in favour of a cabinet proposed by Prime Minister Ibrahim al-Jaafari, a devout Shia, ending a power vacuum that had served to dissipate much of the optimism created by the January 30 election.

But Jaafari failed to name permanent ministers to five key portfolios, including oil and defence, and a top Sunni official criticised the new government as sectarian. Two deputy prime minister posts are also left vacant in the cabinet.

Iraq's new leaders said the government reflected its ethnic and sectarian diversity, a theme politicians frequently stressed in a country where Shias and Kurds are the new powers and Sunnis, who dominated under Saddam, have been sidelined.

Iraqi officials accuse the Sunni Zarqawi of mounting suicide bombings designed to spark civil war.

Officials believe capturing Zarqawi, who has a \$25 million US bounty on his head, would weaken the insurgency. But he remains elusive, despite frequent US and Iraqi government claims that forces have been hot on his trail.

## 'No peace of mind for Bush'

**Dubai, April 29 (Reuters):** Al Qaida's leader in Iraq has called for more suicide attacks on US forces and vowed that President George W. Bush will enjoy no "peace of mind", according to an Internet audio tape attributed to him today.

The speaker, who made a reference that suggested the tape was recorded in late March, identified himself as Jordanian Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. He said that the holy war, or jihad, was still being waged vigorously two years after the US invasion.

He also warned fellow insurgents, however, against entering any negotiations with the Americans or their Iraqi allies. "We promise God that the dog ... Bush will not enjoy peace of mind and that his army will not have a good life as long as our hearts are beating," the speaker said.

Washington's top general acknowledged this week that the insurgency appeared as strong as it was a year ago, despite US efforts to train Iraqi forces.

# Iraq gets partial Cabinet

Patrick Cockburn  
in Baghdad

April 28. — The Iraqi interim National Assembly today voted into office the country's first elected government since the fall of Saddam Hussein.

"This is the first step in building the new Iraq," said the Prime Minister designate Mr Ibrahim al-Jaafari. "The main thing to keep in mind is that no one will be excluded. Whether in the Cabinet or not, all sides will have the right to participate in political process."

But a number of the most powerful positions in the Cabinet are still unfilled and will be held by acting ministers. This shows that disputes between the parties representing the Shi'ite, Kurdish and Sunni factions are unresolved. Mr Al-Jaafari said permanent ministers would be chosen in three or four days.

Some 180 out of 185 deputies present voted for the new government.

Mr Al-Jaafari said: "The



Iraq Prime Minister Mr Ibrahim al-Jaafari briefs reporters after the Cabinet formation in Baghdad on Thursday. — AFP

Iraqis will find that this government has religious, ethnic, political and geographic variety, in addition to the participation of women. Now that the process has started, we will spare no effort to bring back a smile to childrens' faces."

Mr Al-Jaafari himself stumbled as he walked towards the podium in the National Assembly, a miss-step which may be seen by Iraqis as an ill-omen for the future of his government.

The Prime Minister will

for the moment hold the crucial post of defence minister while the acting minister of oil will be Mr Ahmed Jaafari, a leader of the United Iraqi Alliance.

## Saddam turns 68

Former Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein, who celebrated his 68th birthday today in US custody, is in good health and spirits, a spokesman for his lawyers has revealed, AFP adds from Amman. — **The Independent**

As Polling Day Nears, British Oppn Parties Try Hard To Turn WMD 'Lie' Into A Key Election Issue

# Blair forced to defend Iraq war, again

By Rashmee Roshan Lall/TNN

London: Barely a fortnight before Britain goes to the polls, the war in Iraq has been brought back into the political spotlight as opposition parties turn it into a key election issue.

British prime minister Tony Blair faced demands on Monday — the start of the last full week of election campaigning — to hold an inquiry into the UK's case for war in Iraq.

The Liberal Democrats, Britain's third main political party, placed advertisements in newspapers showing a smiling Blair standing alongside US president Bush. The adverts carried the emotive headline 'Never Again', in an attempt to provoke the huge anti-war lobby into a huge elec-

tion-day turn-out and a decisive turning away from Blair's Labour Party.

Lib-Dem leader Charles Kennedy told journalists that "Britain's international reputation has been damaged by the way Tony Blair took us to war." And he poked fun at Blair's cocksure claim "history would be his judge."

Kennedy declared, as he launched a campaign to make the Iraq war the centreground of British politics, that Blair was "wrong. The

British people will be his judge."

The focus on the controversial Iraq war, at the tail-end of the British election campaign, is thought to be a potentially unknown, destabilising quantity for Blair. So far, he has managed to get away with a robust defence of his decision to take Britain to war, by insisting he did what he thought right and respected the views of those who opposed war.

Meanwhile, the main opposition

Conservative Party accused Blair of "lying" over the war, even as sections of the British press reported that the government's chief legal authority offered Blair trenchant advice before the 2003 invasion on why invading Iraq might be a breach of international law. The government's top legal eagle, the attorney general was later quoted to say the invasion, even without the figleaf of a second UN resolution, was legal. But Blair's political opponents said the attorney-general had been put under pressure by the govern-

ment. Blair once again defended his decision to support the Iraq war. "I did what I honestly believe was the right thing to do," he repeated, yet again.



Conservative Party leader Michael Howard looks on as Prime Minister Tony Blair leaves a ceremony to unveil a National Police Memorial in London on Tuesday

N Korea exports nrmadanda ctarinc

# Copter shot down in Iraq

## 11 DEAD IN FIRST DOWNING OF CIVILIAN AIRCRAFT

Reuters  
Baghdad, April 21

GUERRILLAS SHOT down a Bulgarian commercial helicopter in Iraq on Thursday, killing all 11 on board including six Americans, the aircraft's Bulgarian owner said.

The Russian-built Mi-8 helicopter was hit by a rocket-propelled grenade as it flew over a deserted area north of Baghdad, Bulgarian officials and the US military said. It was believed to be the first downing of a civilian aircraft in Iraq.

A militant group said it had shot down the helicopter. "The Islamic Army in Iraq claims responsibility for bringing down a... cargo aircraft and killing all those on board," said the short posting on a Web site often used by Iraqi rebels, adding a full statement and video would follow.

The authenticity of the brief statement could not be verified but it was posted by a user who often releases statements from the group.

The attack came amid a

surge in violence across the country that threatens to overshadow attempts by Iraq's new leaders to form a government nearly three months after elections.

Bulgarian company Heli Air said three Bulgarian crew were killed, as well as six US passengers and two guards from an unspecified country. Officials originally reported nine people had died.

"An Mi-8 helicopter owned by the Bulgarian company Heli Air, and with a Bulgarian crew, was shot down," Bulgaria's defence ministry said in a statement earlier, citing information from its military, which is part of the US-led coalition in Iraq. All those on board were civilians, US military officials said.

The helicopter and crew had been contracted by SkyLink Air and Logistic Support, a US-based company with a contract to supply services to three airports in Iraq, according to Paul Greenaway, a SkyLink manager in Baghdad.

With the deaths of the three helicopter crew, the attack raised the number of

Bulgarians to have died in Iraq to 14 - eight soldiers and six civilians.

The twin-engined Mi-8, which has both commercial and military uses, has been in operation for more than 30 years and can carry up to 24 passengers.

Television footage showed a mangled and still-burning wreckage. The bulk of the aircraft was destroyed, but rotor blades and what appeared to be two engines were visible. Two charred bodies could be also be seen.

Insurgents frequently fire on US aircraft in Iraq and have brought down several helicopters before.

The only civilian aircraft believed to have been struck was a DHL transport plane hit by a rocket as it departed Baghdad airport in November 2003. It managed to turn and land safely.

Thursday's attack came amid a rebound in guerrilla activity in the past two weeks, with more than 20 car bombings in Baghdad and an increase in ambushes, shootings and assassinations.

The violence threatens to

eclipse efforts by elected leaders to form a government, amid growing tensions between Iraq's majority Shi'ite and once-dominant SunnReutersi Muslim communities.

Hopes that a government would be announced on Thursday were dashed late on Wednesday when last-minute disagreements emerged between Shi'ites, who won the January 30 election, and other factions, including interim Prime Minister Iyad Allawi's.

Iraqi President Jalal Talabani and Hussain al-Shahrastani, a senior member of the main Shi'ite alliance, said they did not think a deal would be sealed on Thursday, as previously hoped.

Disputes surfaced on Wednesday when Allawi rejected an offer to join the cabinet, sources involved in the negotiations said.

The constant delays have heightened sectarian tensions, and also seem to have added fuel to the insurgency, which appeared to taper in the first weeks after the elections in January.

22 APR 2005

THE NEW YORK TIMES

# Iraqi resistance may enter a new phase

Formation of the new Government in Iraq is unlikely to quell the popular resistance to the occupation.

Atul Aneja

NINE WEEKS after the controversial elections, Iraq is set to acquire a new government. On April 7, Ibrahim Jaafari, a Shia leader, was named the country's Prime Minister. His name was announced the same day Jalal Talabani, a Kurd, was sworn in President, along with two deputies. The ceremony took place in Baghdad's high security green zone, a sensitive area which guerrillas battling Iraq's two-year old American-led occupation have frequently targeted.

The emerging new government mirrors the outcome of the January 30 elections, in which the Shias and the Kurds emerged the dominant players. The umbrella organisation of the Shias, United Iraqi Alliance (UIA), ended up with 148 seats in the 275-member Assembly, while the Kurdish alliance got 77. Consequently, the post of executive Prime Minister, who will exercise maximum power, has gone to a Shia, while the Kurds have been awarded a figurehead Presidency.

The new assembly has tried to placate the Sunnis, Iraq's second largest community, which mostly boycotted the polls. Ghazi Al Yawer, a Sunni, has been appointed one of the Vice-Presidents. Hajim Al Hassani, also a Sunni, has been named Speaker. Parliament is now slated to write Iraq's new constitution by August 15, and fresh elections, according to an existing timetable, will be held in December.

## Peace unlikely

Contrary to the expectations aired in the mainstream media, the formation of the new government may not result in lasting peace in the resource-rich nation. Unless the new dispensation moves swiftly to address key issues affecting Iraqis and is prepared to confront the U.S. occupation authorities through mass mobilisations, the chances are the armed resistance against the occupation will not recede.

Sunni groups have so far spearheaded the Iraqi resistance, though Shias loyal to the young cleric Moqtada Al Sadr have revolted twice against the occupation. The uprising last year had led to a full-scale U.S. crack-



**COMMON DEMAND:** Anti-U.S. protestors atop the "Freedom Statue" that replaced Saddam Hussein's in Baghdad. The banner reads, "All Iraqis of all sects demand the occupying forces leave." PHOTO: AFP

down in the Shia strongholds of Najaf and Sadr city, on the outskirts of Baghdad.

It is now well recorded that the Iraqis who voted on January 30 saw in the polls an opportunity to end the occupation. Responding to the popular sentiment, the UIA sought the withdrawal of the U.S. and pushed this demand to the top of its election agenda. The Shia alliance said it would begin negotiations with the occupation forces so as to set a timetable for their pullout.

The UIA is now under pressure to deliver on its promise. The Association of Muslim Scholars (AMS), a powerful Sunni religious group that exercises considerable influence over the resistance, has declared, more than once, that the new government should set a time-table for the U.S. withdrawal from Iraq. Moqtada Al Sadr's group has also endorsed the Sunni call for the declaration of a timeline on the U.S. presence in Iraq.

## Pressure mounting

The pressure on the new government is likely to become more intense as the Sunnis are not too pleased with the appointment of

Mr. Hassani as the Speaker. Despite being a Sunni, his track record does not appear to have inspired much confidence within the community. His background shows that he was once a sympathiser of the Muslim Brotherhood, a conservative religious grouping with political ambitions.

Secular-minded Sunnis have been, therefore, wary of him. The new Speaker has also spent long years in exile in the U.S. and his association with the Americans has not gone down well among ordinary Sunnis.

Besides, Mr. Hassani's handling of the crisis in Fallujah, resulting from the brutal U.S. bombardment of the city, also appears to have alienated him from the masses. He refused to resign from the interim government, in which he was Industry Minister, despite being asked to do so by his Iraqi Islamic party, following the November attack. Consequently, the party, which is popular among Sunnis, expelled him.

The UIA has so far dithered from confronting the Americans frontally, with its leaders avoiding fixing a definite timetable for the withdrawal.

A new grouping has challenged the American presence. On February 15, the "Anti-Occupation Patriotic Forces" announced their presence and raised seven demands. The grouping has the AMS and Moqtada Al-Sadr's group as its pillars.

Significantly, the alliance includes a few constituents outside the Islamic ideological fold, such as secular and leftist forces as well as women groups.

Its demands include a "clear, precise, public and binding under international guarantees" timetable for the withdrawal. Iraqis, it stresses, should exercise full sovereignty in their country.

It has thus opposed U.S. plans for a permanent military presence in Iraq through a string of military bases. The AMS publicly supported Mr. Al-Sadr's call on April 9 for mass protests against the American occupation.

It is not inconceivable that this alliance, with clear non-sectarian overtones, may acquire a higher profile and give the resistance a new political meaning in the months to come.

18 APR 2005

THE HINDU

# Iraq rebels step up the pressure

Reuters  
Baghdad, April 15

**BOMBS TARGETING US** and Iraqi forces killed at least four people on Friday as insurgents stepped up pressure on Iraq's new leaders after a lull in violence since the January elections.

A roadside bomb near the central city of Samarra killed two Iraqi soldiers, an army source said. A car bomb intended for a US military convoy passing through Baghdad's upscale Mansour neighbourhood killed at least one person and wounded five, including an American soldier, police and the US military said.

Al Qaeda's wing in Iraq said one of its suicide bombers drove his vehicle into a convoy of American "cross worshippers" while travelling in Mansour and inflicted casualties.

"They are still gather-

ing their dead and wounded," the group said in a statement posted on a website used by Islamists.

On the other side of the capital shortly afterwards, a bomb targeting Iraqi National Guard troops killed a civilian and wounded three others, police said.

The attacks were small-scale by Iraq's standards, but reinforced concerns over resurgence in the violence that has been so common over the past two years and which seemed to have subsided since the election.

The fresh violence is worrying for Iraq's newly elected leaders, who have been squabbling over the formation of a government for the past 11 weeks — indecision that some fear could play into the hands of insurgents.

Iraq has appointed a president and prime minister but key interior, oil and defence ministers have yet to be chosen.

## সূচনা হিসাবে ভাল

জালাল তালাবানি সরাসরি ইতিহাসে প্রবেশ করিলেন। কারণ, জালাল তালাবানি শুধু ইরাকের নূতন প্রেসিডেন্টই নহেন, তিনি একটি প্রতীক। প্রতীকের এই বিভা তাঁহার শিরে লাগিয়াছে, কেননা ইরাকের ইতিহাসে তিনিই প্রথম কুর্দ প্রেসিডেন্ট। তদুপরি, আরব নহেন এমন কোনও ব্যক্তি আরব দুনিয়ার কোনও রাষ্ট্রপ্রধান পদে আসিলেন, এমন ঘটনাও প্রথম ঘটিল। গভীরতর অর্থে, তালাবানি নূতন একটি সুসমন্বিত ইরাকের স্বপ্ন দেখাইয়াছেন। স্বপ্নটি গণতান্ত্রিকও বটে। তালাবানি স্বয়ং কুর্দ। যুগ্ম উপ-রাষ্ট্রপ্রধান পদে যাঁহারা আসিলেন, তাঁহাদের এক জন শিয়া, অন্য জন সুন্নি। ত্রি-ধারার এই সমন্বয় ইরাককে ভবিষ্যতে নূতন দিশা দেখাইবে, এমন আশা করাই যায়। সাদ্দাম হুসেন যাহা করেন নাই, যুদ্ধোত্তর ইরাকের প্রথম নির্বাচনজাত সরকার সেই কাজটি করিয়া নিঃসন্দেহে একটি শুভ সূচনা করিল। মার্কিন হানাদারি-উত্তর পর্বে হালফিল ইরাক বিভিন্ন অর্থেই স্বতন্ত্র। প্রেসিডেন্ট এবং তাঁহার দুই সহকারীর চয়ন প্রক্রিয়া সেই স্বাতন্ত্র্যেরই ইঙ্গিতবাহী। ভাবী প্রধানমন্ত্রী পদে যিনি প্রথম পছন্দ, সেই ইব্রাহিম আল জাফারি পেশায় চিকিৎসক। সুভদ্র, জনপ্রিয় এই নেতা প্রধানমন্ত্রী পদে আসিলে পূর্বতন লৌহ জমানার কড়াকড়ির প্রস্থান অনেকাংশেই সম্পূর্ণ হইবে বলিয়া মনে করা হইতেছে। আল-জাফারি যে দলের সদস্য, সেই 'দাওয়া পার্টি' ধর্ম-বিরহিত না হইলেও আদর্শেই কটুর ধর্মতান্ত্রিক নহে। ইসলামকে রাষ্ট্রধর্ম হিসাবে স্বীকার করিলেও এই দলের একটি প্রভাবশালী অংশ মনে করেন যে রাজনৈতিক ক্রিয়া-প্রক্রিয়া মৌলবিগণের স্থান নহে। অসম্মত, এখনও পর্যন্ত জমানা-বদলের সাক্ষাগুলি এতই স্পষ্ট যে নির্বাচনোত্তর ইরাকে প্রেসিডেন্ট চয়নের প্রক্রিয়া ভিডিও-মারফত দেখিয়া বন্দি সাদ্দাম হুসেন যদি চমকাইয়া থাকেন, তাহা স্বাভাবিক।

যাহা অস্বাভাবিক, তাহা হইল রাতারাতি ইরাকের একটি আমূল পরিবর্তনের স্বপ্ন। যে সকল জেট ইরাকের অভ্যন্তরে গড়িয়া উঠিতেছে, বা যাহারা জায়মান, তাহাদের ভিতরে সম্পর্কটি জটিল ও বিচিত্র। তাই, ইংরাজি 'মর্নিং শোজ দ্য ডে' প্রবাদটি এই ক্ষেত্রে কতখানি কার্যকর হইবে, সেই ব্যাপারেও সংশয় বিস্তর। দৃষ্টান্ত হিসাবে ইরাকের একটি বাঁটোয়ারার কথা উল্লেখ করা যায়। শিয়া-পন্থী 'সুপ্রিম কাউন্সিল ফর ইসলামিক রেভলিউশন ইন ইরাক' (এস সি আই আর আই)-এর নেতা আদেল আবদ আল মাহদি যে প্রধানমন্ত্রী পদের জন্য স্বীয় দাবিটি ছাড়িয়া দিলেন, তাহাতে ইরাকের ধর্মনিরপেক্ষ জনতা ও সুন্নিগণ স্বস্তি পাইয়াছেন, সন্দেহ নাই, কিন্তু অন্তরালে অন্য একটি শঙ্কাও মাথা চাড়া দিয়াছে। শঙ্কাটি ইহাই যে আল মাহদিকে প্রধানমন্ত্রী করা হইবে না, ইহার বিনিময়ে 'দাওয়া পার্টি' ইরাকের স্বরাষ্ট্রমন্ত্রক এবং প্রতিরক্ষা মন্ত্রক দুটিকে 'এস সি আই আর আই'কে ছাড়িয়া দেয় নাই তো? সেই ক্ষেত্রে ওই দলের শিয়া-পন্থী মিলিশিয়া দেশের গুরুত্বপূর্ণ দুইটি মন্ত্রকে প্রভাব বিস্তার করিবার চেষ্টা করিবে বলিয়া অনেকেই মনে করিতেছেন। তৎসহ, পাশ্চাত্য শিক্ষাদীক্ষায় প্রাণিত নেতাগণের সহিত দীর্ঘ তিন দশক বাথ পার্টির শাসনে থাকা ইরাকি আমজনতার যোগাযোগটি কী রূপে অগ্রসর হয়, তাহাও খেয়াল রাখা প্রয়োজন। এখনও পর্যন্ত, সূচনাটি নিঃসন্দেহে শুভ, কিন্তু এখনই উদ্বাহ হইবার কোনও কারণ নাই। উত্তর-সাদ্দাম জমানায় গণতান্ত্রিক ইরাকের সম্মুখে পরিক্রমার জন্য দীর্ঘ পথ পড়িয়া আছে। সহসা কোনও বৈপ্লবিক। বদলের খোয়াবনামা রচনা না করাই শ্রেয়।

08 APR 2005

ANADABAZAR PATRIKA

Shi'ite leader  
named as  
Iraqi PM



Mr Ibrahim al-Jaafari

BAGHDAD, April 7. — The Shi'ite leader, Mr Ibrahim al-Jaafari, was today chosen as Prime Minister of Iraq by the Presidential Council after prolonged wrangling between the victors in the election held nine weeks ago.

The solemnity of the moment was marred when the new Iraqi President, Mr Jalal Talabani, mysteriously left the ceremony. When he re-emerged he explained that he had momentarily forgotten the name of the new Prime Minister whom he was appointing.

Mr Jaafari, the mild-mannered leader of the Islamic Dawa party, did not look disturbed by Mr Talabani's sudden memory loss. But other members of the United Iraqi Alliance, the Shi'ite coalition which won a majority in parliament, saw it as a possible ill-omen for future relations between Kurds and Shi'ites.

08 APR 2005

THE STATESMAN



# Kurd leader chosen Iraq President

By Atul Aneja

**MANAMA, APRIL 6.** After several weeks of deadlock, Iraq's newly elected Parliament has chosen Kurdish leader Jalal Talabani as its new President. The outgoing President, Ghazi Al Yawer, a Sunni, and the current interim Finance Minister, Adel Abdul Mahdi, a Shia, have been named as the two Vice-Presidents.

The appointment of the President is largely symbolic, but the stage has been set for the formation of government. Mr. Talabani and the two Vice-Presidents would name an executive Prime Minister. The Transitional Assembly, which was elected on January 30, is slated to write constitution by August 15.

Fresh elections would be called in December. Mr. Talabani's appointment follows protracted negotiations, which mainly involved the Shia and Kurdish communities, who have got the maximum number of seats in the 275-member Assembly.

## Acceptable to U.S.

The Kurds insisted on Mr. Talabani in return for the support for the Shia nominee, Ibrahim Jaffari, for the post of Prime Minister. AFP quoted the outgoing interim Foreign Minister, Hoshyar Zebari, as saying that a Cabinet headed by Mr. Jaafari would be approved "within a few days."

As Parliament met, guerillas fired mor-



**Jalal Talabani**

tar rounds, which landed near the Ministry of Agriculture building, injuring at least one Iraqi civilian. One U.S. soldier was killed on Tuesday, while four other American personnel have died over the past two days. The total U.S. death toll till Tuesday was 1,537, according to figures provided by the Pentagon.

The Iraqi interim Human Rights Minister, Bhaktiar Amin, quoting an official survey claimed that 6,000 Iraqi civilians had been killed and 16,000 wounded during the last two years of the U.S. occupation.

07 APR 2005

THE HINDU

# Iran opens nuke door

**Natanz (Iran), March 30** (Reuters): Iran's President Mohammad Khatami took a group of journalists deep underground today into the heart of a key nuclear plant which Washington wants dismantled and whose existence was kept secret until 2002.

About 30 local and foreign journalists visited Natanz uranium enrichment facility, 250 km south of Tehran, the centrepiece of a disputed atomic fuel drive which Tehran suspended under international pressure in late 2003.

The unprecedented visit was an unusual gesture of openness by the Islamic state. Reporters, allowed to photograph and film the complex, were



**Iranian President Mohammad Khatami (right) at the Natanz nuclear plant on Wednesday.** (AFP)

later shown parts of another atomic facility in Isfahan.

Iran says its nuclear programme is nothing for the world to fear and will only be used to generate much-needed electricity. But Washington and the European Union fear

Iran could use its nuclear plants to produce bombs.

The journalists, invited to accompany Khatami on a tour of the 450-hectare site, were taken inside a building where, two levels below ground, they were shown a vast empty hall

designed to house 50,000 enrichment centrifuges.

Centrifuges purify uranium fluoride gas into reactor or bomb fuel by spinning at high speeds. Low-grade enriched uranium is used in atomic power plants but highly enriched uranium can be used in the core of a bomb. "If we were looking to make atomic weapons...we could have completed these (facilities)...in hiding," Khatami said.

The journalists were not shown any centrifuges and were not taken to a pilot enrichment facility in Natanz which contains dozens of machines, currently idled while Iran discusses the future of its nuclear programme with the EU.

# Iraq democracy goes under cover

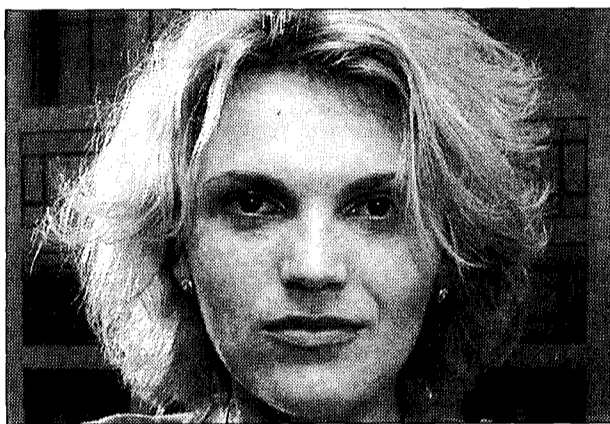
Baghdad, March 29 (Reuters): It was hardly the greatest advertisement for democracy in West Asia.

Within minutes of the start of Iraq's second session of parliament today the meeting was suddenly declared secret and journalists were kicked out after several assembly members leapt up to question their leaders' competence.

The session — only the second time the assembly has met since it was elected two months ago — was expected to make several key appointments, including the parliamentary speaker.

But it descended into chaos after the body's eldest member, the stand-in speaker, announced that they couldn't decide who the actual speaker should be and would instead discuss rules. With live television pictures rolling, half a dozen of the 275 assembly members jumped up to criticise the failure to reach a decision and called for an explanation.

A woman in full-length black robes, one of 85 women elected to parliament, stood up to say the eight million Iraqis who risked their lives to vote



Romanian journalist Marie-Jeanne Ion, a reporter for Prima TV, was kidnapped in Iraq on Monday with her colleague Dumitru Miscoci and Ovidiu Ohanesian from Romania Libera newspaper. (AFP)

on January 30 deserved better.

"The people should know who is behind all this delay, they have the right to know and they should know," she said, her voice quavering and finger occasionally jabbing. Others immediately followed her lead, voicing Iraqis' growing frustration at their elected officials.

"The Iraqi people that defied the security threats and voted — what shall we tell

them?" asked Hussein al-Sadr, a member of a coalition headed by interim Prime Minister Iyad Allawi.

Sensing a growing wave of frustration and a possible debacle, the temporary speaker took action, ordering all journalists out of the room. That provoked further objections from the assembly, but the speaker was firm.

"I am the speaker and I have decided this," declared

Dhari al-Fayad, speaking in a conference centre that was once part of Saddam Hussein's presidential complex.

Allawi, whose coalition came third in the election and who has turned down requests to join the yet-to-be-formed government, walked out of the session shortly afterwards.

At a Baghdad coffee shop, residents who watched the proceedings on television were appalled by the mess. "It's impossible for them to agree on anything," said Ahmed Hatim, 45. "They don't want to serve Iraq. They are after power and privileges."

## Baghdad bomb kills 7

A CAR bomber killed seven people and wounded nine on Monday near a crowd of Shia pilgrims travelling south of Baghdad to an annual religious ceremony that officials feared would draw attacks.

In Baghdad, political leaders met again to try to agree on cabinet posts two months after the election. Iraq's National Assem-

bly is due to meet for its second session on Tuesday and may unveil some senior positions but not the full cabinet. Police said the car bomber struck on a road leading towards Kerbala, a sacred Shia city where hundreds of thousands of pilgrims will mark Arbain, an annual mourning ceremony, this week.

**Reuters, Baghdad**

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

29 MAR 2005

# Iraq war: the question of legality

By Robin Cook

IT IS difficult not to feel a sneaking sympathy for the United Kingdom Attorney General, Lord Goldsmith. On Iraq he was expected to find a basis in international law for Downing Street to perform as the loyal ally of a Bush administration that consistently rejected even the concept of international law. For the neo-conservatives around George W. Bush, it was a guiding principle that the U.S. should undertake no policy that conferred validity on the concept of international law. Is it any surprise that Lord Goldsmith should have been left struggling to find validity in international law for their policy on Iraq?

The degree of his problem is painfully revealed in the three distinct phases through which his legal opinion metamorphosed. Phase one lasted for six months up to the eve of war, when he agreed with the legal advisers to the U.K. Foreign Office that invasion would require a second Security Council resolution to be lawful. This view was dropped only when it became clear that there would be no second resolution.

Phase two culminated in a lengthy, balanced opinion which argued that invasion might be lawful on the basis of existing resolutions, but that the British Government could be vulnerable to being challenged in court. This phase lasted 10 days and was

terminated by the refusal of Admiral Sir Michael Boyce, the chief of U.K. defence staff, to commit troops to action without an unequivocal guarantee that it would be lawful.

Three days before the invasion, the Attorney General provided what Sir Michael demanded in a written statement that authority to use force could be exhumed from the ceasefire resolution of the first Gulf War over a

rather an unequivocal assurance that Iraq was in breach of its disarmament obligations.

Lord Goldsmith might not have committed himself to his final opinion if he had been told, as the U.K. committee of inquiry under Lord Butler discovered, that the intelligence was "thin," "inferential" and depended on only three sources, two of which have since been discredited.

## *Iraq remains a source of constant controversy for Tony Blair who always assumed that the war would end in victory, and that military triumph would silence the critics.*

It may be that in the privacy of his office Lord Goldsmith feels as aggrieved as the rest of the nation that Downing Street did not tell him that Hans Blix had already inspected 30 sites suggested by British intelligence and found no evidence of WMD.

I suspect also that as Tony Blair turned out the bedroom light last night (March 24), he was mystified that the controversy over Iraq still haunts him. In the many conversations we had in the run-up to the war, he always assumed that the war would end in victory, and that military triumph would silence the critics. Part of the reason why Iraq has stubbornly stayed at the top of the

agenda is the breathtaking naivety with which both the White House and the Downing Street believed the easy promises of Iraqi exiles that foreign occupation would meet with no resistance.

But the major reason why Iraq has remained such a source of constant controversy is the slow seepage of the information that was kept from us when we were being sold the case for war. We were told that the threat was current and serious, but we now know the intelligence was limited and the sources unproven. We were told that occupying Iraq would be a defeat for terrorism, but we now know the Joint Intelligence Committee warned, correctly, that it would give a boost to terrorism. And now we learn that the legal case for war was cobbled together at the eleventh hour after months of equivocation.

In her brave resignation letter, the former legal adviser to the U.K. Foreign Office, Elizabeth Wilmshurst, warned that without a second resolution "force on such a scale amounts to a crime of aggression." On the same day that she submitted it, the U.K. House of Commons voted on the war. Would Parliament have backed invasion of Iraq if it had known that the legal advisers at the Foreign Office believed they were committing Britain to aggression? —

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THE HINDU

26 MAR 2005

## Worldwide protests against U.S.

**LONDON, MARCH 20.** From London's Trafalgar Square to the streets of Sao Paulo, tens of thousands of people around the world protested the Iraq war on the second anniversary of the U.S.-led invasion.

British elections expected in May lent an added charge to the largest European protest, in London, where the Prime Minister Tony Blair's staunch backing of the war has dented his support.

Police said about 45,000 demonstrators participated in a march from Hyde Park past the U.S. Embassy and on to Trafalgar Square. Organisers said almost 100,000 took part. Several army veterans were among the demonstrators.

In the U.S., anti-war activists marched in the streets of cities big and small, stopping traffic and wearing masks of the President George W. Bush, the Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, and the Secretary of Defence Donald Rumsfeld.

Hundreds listened to anti-war speeches at the United Nations in New York before marching across Manhattan. A small contingent of protesters then lay down next to flag-draped cardboard coffins outside a military recruiting station. Police moved in and arrested 27 protesters. — AP



**GLOBAL ECHO:** A massive protest marking the second anniversary of the U.S. invasion of Iraq, in San Francisco, on Saturday. — AP

# Two years on, U.S. faces raging resistance in Iraq

By Atul Aneja

**MANAMA, MARCH 20.** Iraqi guerillas killed five police officers signalling that there was no let up in the resistance to American occupation amid worldwide protests marking the second anniversary of the U.S. invasion of Iraq.

Of the five killed, one was a police commissioner appointed by the U.S.-backed Iraqi interim government.

The raging violence and the global anti-war protests, analysts point out, have contradicted

many U.S. assertions, including the argument that the invasion was about eliminating weapons of mass destruction and spreading democracy in West Asia.

An editorial in the U.S. journal, *Monthly Review*, has pointed out that in early October 2004, Charles Duelfer, the CIA's top weapons inspector, had officially confirmed in a 918-page report delivered to two U.S. Congressional committees that Iraq did not have weapons of mass destruction at the time of the invasion.

The editorial points to a study

conducted by Canadian author Linda McQuaig that concludes that the war was, "about oil, money, and power—and nothing else."

### Control over oil

Ms. McQuaig quotes an interview with Fadel Gheit, a leading oil analyst for the Wall Street firm, Oppenheimer and Co., which suggests that control over the oil was the prime objective of the invasion.

"Think of Iraq as virgin territory.... This is bigger than anything that [the U.S. oil giant]

Exxon is involved in currently...It is the superstar of the future. That's why Iraq becomes the most sought-after real estate on the face of the earth," Mr. Gheit observed. Iraq is strategically located so that the occupying power is well paced to dominate the other oil countries of West Asia, as well as the oil dependent industrial zones including Europe and Japan.

Dilip Hiro, a West Asia specialist demolishes the theory that the invasion was driven by a commitment towards democracy.

Tracing the American track record in the region, Mr. Hiro concludes, "The United States flaunts the banner of democracy in [West Asia] only when that advances its economic, military, or strategic interests."

### Controversial elections

Two years after the invasion, a majority of Iraqis oppose the U.S. occupation.

The *Newsweek* magazine reported in its January 31 edition, a day after Iraq's controversial elections that, "Now every major poll shows an ever-larger

majority of Iraqis want the Americans to leave." The Abu Ghraib prisoners abuse scandal, the flattening of Fallujah, which led to massive civilian casualties last year, and use of excessive force in the Shia strongholds of Sadr city and Najaf, to counter a revolt led by the cleric Moqtada Al-Sadr, have played major role in turning the opinion against the occupation.

While the U.S. death toll has crossed 1,510, around 2,000 Iraqi uniformed personnel have been killed over the last two years.

# Bombings mar Iraq House session

Reuters  
Baghdad, March 16

IRAQ'S NEW parliament met for the first time on Wednesday, more than six weeks after it was elected in historic polls, but without a government as rival sectarian and ethnic blocs bickered over a coalition deal.

However, members of the United Iraqi Alliance and Kurdish leaders reached a "memorandum of understanding" on the formation of a new government, officials revealed.

Several Baghdad streets were closed and traffic restricted to try to thwart insurgent attacks, but guerrillas fired a barrage of rockets and mortar into the fortified Green Zone compound before the meeting began. Windows rattled and lights flickered in the convention centre where parliament was sitting.

Politicians said the meeting

## Anger at US prompts Italy troops pullout

ITALY PRIME Minister Silvio Berlusconi has announced under public pressure that he would begin withdrawing his country's troops from Iraq in September following the killing of an Italian officer by US troops. "I've spoken to Tony Blair about this," he told a TV channel. "We've got to construct a precise exit

strategy. Public opinion expects it, and we shall be talking about it soon," he added. On March 4, a senior intelligence officer, Nicola Calipari, was killed by US troops in Baghdad after rescuing an Italian hostage. His death united right and left in appalled condemnation.

GNS, London

represented a step forward despite the lack of consensus on the government. "We are part of history," said Ibrahim Bahr al-Uloum, a candidate for oil minister, adding, "This assembly has to succeed in charting the principles of a democratic, united Iraq." Kurdish delegate Fuad Masoum echoed the sentiment. "It is

a great day in Iraqi history that its elected representatives meet," he said. "This day coincides with a painful memory that has many meanings. Today, on this occasion, we celebrate the inauguration of the parliament after the fall of the previous regime," he added.

Wednesday marked the an-

niversary of the Saddam Hussein - ordered chemical attack in 1988 on the northern Kurdish town of Halabja, that resulted in the death of more than 5,000 people.

The Shia Islamist alliance that won 140 seats - just over half of the 275-member National Assembly - and the Kurdish coalition that came second with 75 seats are deadlocked in negotiations over a government. There is a tentative agreement that Ibrahim Jaafari of the Shia Dawa party will be Prime Minister and Kurdish leader Jalal Talabani will be President, with a Sunni Arab candidate probably being offered the job of Parliament Speaker.

But talks have stalled over Kurdish demands to expand their northern autonomous zone to include the strategic oil city of Kirkuk and the fate of the Kurdish peshmerga militias, which Shias want to be absorbed in Iraq's official security force.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

17 MAR 2005

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

# Egyptian help key to Iraqi chemical weapons, says CIA

**New York:** Egypt secretly supplied crucial help—both technology and expert manpower—to the chemical weapons programme of Saddam Hussein's Iraq in the 1980s, US arms investigators have found.

The CIA's Iraq Survey Group says Egyptian specialists helped the Iraqis make "technological leaps" on poison gas at the height of the Iran-Iraq War, when Baghdad used nerve agents to kill thousands of Iranian soldiers and Iranian and Iraqi civilians.

The US report is the most authoritative and detailed since such collaboration between the Arab nations was first rumored in the late 1980s. The Cairo government rejected those earlier allegations, and Egypt's Washington embassy reiterated that denial when asked by The Associated Press about the CIA report. But in AP interviews, United Nations arms inspectors who scoured Iraq's files and facili-

ties in the 1990s corroborated the US finding.

Like former enemy Israel, Egypt has long been believed to possess chemical weapons. Experts say there's strong evidence Egyptian warplanes repeatedly used mustard-gas bombs against royalist forces during Cairo's intervention in the Yemen civil war of the 1960s.



In 1981, after the outbreak of war with Iran, Saddam's Iraqi government paid Egypt \$12 million "in return for assistance with production and storage of chemical weapons agents", the US weapons hunters say in a little-noticed annex of their Comprehensive Report, a 350,000-word document issued last October.

The Iraq Survey Group, led by CIA special adviser Charles A Duelfer, had spent 20 months in 2003-2004 searching for evidence of Iraqi weapons of mass destruction, cited by President Bush as the rationale for invading Iraq two years ago. NYT News Service



# Iran resists American lollipops

**Tehran, March 13 (Reuters):** Washington is "hallucinating" if it thinks Iran will scrap its nuclear fuel production plans in return for economic incentives, a senior Iranian official was quoted as saying on Sunday.

The US offered the encouragements in support of the European Union which is negotiating with Iran to try to persuade it to give up sensitive nuclear activities.

US officials are either unaware of the substance of the talks or (they are) "hallucinating", Sirus Naseri, a senior member of Iran's nuclear negotiating team, told the official IRNA news agency.

Iran says it needs atomic technology to generate electricity and will never use it to make bombs, as the US fears.

London's *Sunday Times* said Israel had drawn up plans for a combined air and ground attack on Iranian nuclear installations if diplomacy fails to halt Tehran's atomic programme.

The newspaper said Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and his inner cabinet had given "initial authorisation" for a unilateral attack at a private meeting last month.

Israel, which bombed Iraq's Osirak nuclear reactor in 1981, played down the report. Iran has said it will respond vigorously to any attack on its nuclear plants.

Washington gave practical backing for the EU's diplomatic approach on Friday, offering to allow Iran to begin talks on joining the World Trade Organisation and consider letting it buy civilian airline parts if it ceased all activities that could produce fuel for nu-

clear power plants or atomic weapons.

Washington and the EU have warned Iran it faces referral to the UN Security Council, which could impose economic sanctions, if it fails to allay fears that it wants the bomb.

Iran dismissed the US offer as insignificant. Intelligence Minister Ali Yunesi told IRNA it was "funny and disrespectful".

"The US should apologise to Iran for making this proposal," he said, going on to describe US secretary of state Condoleezza Rice as a "queen of war and violence".

Naseri said it was not clear if greater US involvement in the negotiations was "helpful or an obstacle to progress".

He said the EU, which has persuaded Iran to suspend potentially weapons-related activities like uranium enrichment while the two sides try to reach a solution, was close to accepting that Iran would not give up enrichment.

Instead, Tehran has offered to give "objective guarantees" that it will not divert nuclear fuel to military uses.

"It seems the Europeans are ready to adopt a logical position," Naseri said.

Iran has refused to disclose its guarantees publicly but diplomats and analysts say it is offering to allow intrusive inspections that ensure it only enriches uranium to a low grade which would be unsuitable for weapons.

It may also be prepared to restrict its enrichment activities to a pilot project, too small to make weapons production practical, diplomats and analysts say.

# Iran rejects U.S. offer on nuclear issue

By Atul Aneja

**MANAMA, MARCH 12.** Iran has rejected new economic incentives offered by the United States in order to curb its nuclear enrichment programme, and said that it would not give up its "legitimate right."

"No pressure, bribe or threat can make Iran give up its legitimate right" to use nuclear technology for peaceful purposes, an Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman announced.

The U.S. President, George W. Bush, announced a change in American policy towards Iran on Friday.

Amplifying the U.S. position, the Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice, announced that a decade-long bar on Iran's

membership of the World Trade Organisation would be lifted if Iran cooperated. Teheran, she said, would also be entitled to buy parts for commercial planes.

## Legitimate right

The spokesman, Hamid Reza Asefi, said today, "The remedying of some of the faults and the addressing some of the restrictions that were imposed on the Islamic Republic of Iran without any cause will not prevent Iran from getting its legitimate right" to develop a nuclear energy capability.

He said "The restrictions regarding [aircraft] spare parts that were of no military use should have not been imposed from the beginning, and lifting

them is not an incentive." Mr. Asefi added, "getting into the WTO is the right of all countries of the world."

Iran has denied seeking nuclear weapons, but has insisted that it has every right to use atomic energy for peaceful purposes.

It has maintained that its oil reserves are finite and it needs atomic energy for generating electricity to meet its future needs. Iran has, however, suspended nuclear enrichment following talks with Britain, France and Germany.

The U.S. and the European Union now want Iran to end nuclear enrichment permanently, and have threatened to seek United Nations sanctions in case of non-compliance.

## Ukraine begins Iraq pullout

**KIEV, MARCH 12.** Ukraine withdrew 150 servicemen from Iraq on Saturday, starting a phased pullout that officials have said will be completed by October, the Defence Ministry said.

A company of soldiers that was based near As Suwayrah left Iraq and is expected to return to Ukraine by Tuesday, the Ministry said.

Earlier this month, the Ukrainian President, Viktor Yushchenko, and top defence officials ordered a phased withdrawal of Ukraine's 1,650-strong contingent from the U.S. coalition in Iraq.

Ukraine strongly opposed the U.S.-led war but later agreed to send a large contingent to serve under Polish command in central and southern Iraq.

The move was widely seen as an effort by the former President, Leonid Kuchma, to repair relations with Washington, frayed by allegations that he had approved the sale of radar systems and other military equipment to Saddam Hussein's regime in violation of U.N. sanctions.

Ukraine has lost 17 soldiers in Iraq, and the deployment is deeply unpopular among people in the former Soviet republic.

### **Policemen killed**

Meanwhile in Iraq, gunmen shot dead three policemen and wounded a third Saturday at a funeral procession in the northern city of Mosul, police said.

The attack occurred as police were taking part in a procession held for a colleague's wife and two children who died in a roadside bomb attack in Mosul a day earlier.

On Friday, weeping relatives gathered in small groups to bury 50 people killed by a suicide bomber in this northern city, after cancelling a mass funeral procession for fear of another attack.

As the mostly Shia Muslim families mourned their dead, Iraq's main Shia and Kurdish coalitions agreed in Baghdad on a deal dividing up the top three posts in the new government, but differences remained over the deployment of Arab troops in ethnic Kurdish areas.

North of the capital, militants blew up an oil pipeline in the latest attack targeting the country's fragile economic infrastructure. — AFP/AP

# Massacre graves surface in Iraq

*Handwritten: ABC, 10/3, draw*

**Baghdad, March 9** (Reuters): Police found the bodies of 41 Iraqis beheaded or shot by insurgents at two sites in Qaim, 500 km west of Baghdad, the latest in a series of mass killings by guerrilla groups.

In Qaim, the bodies of 26 people, including one woman, were found. A doctor said the victims, in civilian clothes, had been shot two days ago.

Fifteen bodies — some shot, others beheaded — were found just south of Baghdad in the Sunni-dominated area now known as the “triangle of death”, Iraqi army sources said.

Insurgents have frequently dumped large numbers of bodies in public places as a warning to others. The victims are usually police, soldiers or Iraqis working with the US military.

A doctor at Qaim hospital said a police identification document was found on one of the corpses.

## Suicide bombing

A suicide bomber in a garbage truck packed with explosives killed two policemen near a Baghdad hotel today.

Al Qaida's wing in Iraq, led by Jordanian militant Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, said it carried out the Baghdad attack that wounded at least 20 others — part of its relentless campaign to bring down the government and drive out US troops.

Mainly Sunni insurgents have kept up a campaign of suicide attacks, car bombings and execution-style killings,

## Berlusconi plea to US

**Rome, March 9** (Reuters): The US must assume responsibility for the “friendly fire” killing of an Italian intelligence agent in Iraq in order to put the incident behind the two allies, the Italian Prime Minister said today.

The Italian leader welcomed an offer from the US to hold a joint investigation of last Friday's shooting outside the Baghdad airport. Agent Nicola Calipari was shot dead as he was taking freed hostage Giuliana Sgrena to safety.

denting Iraqi and US officials' hopes that landmark January 30 elections would help stabilise the country.

Their ranks have been boosted by frustration at the US occupation, a growing number of shootings of Iraqi civilians and by abuse of prisoners in US-manned jails.

“Our brother Karim ibn al-Karim bin al-Karim, along with a group of mujahideen, targeted... what should be called the hotel of the Jews because it is their safe-haven and stronghold,” al Qaida Organisation for Holy War in Iraq said in a statement posted on an Islamic website.

“The mujahideen opened fire on the police and guards protecting the Jews and when the entrance was clear, the hero... blew up the infidels,” the group said, adding that the attack was timed to avoid harming any Muslim passers-by.

An Iraqi militant group, Islamic Army in Iraq, posted an Internet video showing two Sudanese hostages urging other drivers in Iraq not to work with occupation forces.

# The Iraqis' daily struggle

By Haifa Zangana

**B**EHIND THE facade of post-election political process, despite British Prime Minister Tony Blair's desire to move on and U.S. President George W. Bush's attempt to mend fences with Europe, in Iraq the atrocities continue to mount. Some, like the Hilla attack, are Zarqawi-style, with hundreds dead and wounded. Others are more mundane and sustained, like U.S. warplanes bombing suspect houses in Ramadi, Hit, or Mosul, roadblock killings in Najaff, or post-curfew hunting by snipers in Sammara.

Despite all the rhetoric about "building a new democracy," daily life for most Iraqis is still a struggle for survival, with human rights abuses engulfing them. A typical Iraqi day begins with the struggle to get the basics: petrol, a cylinder of gas, fresh water, food and medication. It ends with a sigh of relief. *Alhamdu ilah* (thanks, God), for surviving death threats, violent attacks, kidnappings and killings.

For ordinary Iraqis, simply venturing into the streets brings the possibility of attack. Most killings go unreported. With no names, no faces, no identities, they cease to be human beings. They are "the enemy," "collateral damage" or, at best, statistics to argue about.

In March 1989, Iraqi and Arab writers contributed to a book called *Halabja*, to condemn Saddam Hussein's regime for using chemical weapons against civilians in the city. At the time of the attack, Saddam was still the darling of the West.

In my introduction to the book, I wrote: "They say 5,000 people died. Others say 10,000 died. We say: in

goodbye to his mother and his children: Dalal, 17, Shahad, 12, Maha, 9, and Zayed, 11.

Hazim never came back. He was shot, according to eyewitnesses, by a U.S. patrol. His car was burned and, because of the curfew, his family had to wait until the next morning to start looking for him. Two days later, his charred and barely recognisable

a mirage similar to weapons of mass destruction.

Occupation troops are responsible for an increasing list of abuses, including the torture and killing of Iraqi prisoners. Seeing a corpse photographed with grinning U.S. soldiers at Abu Chraib shocked the moral sensibility of people around the world. Taking snaps of Hazim's charred body has shaken his family's belief in the humanity of the Americans, as well as the British and the Iraqis working with them.

Following the U.S. and British Governments' line on human rights, members of the interim Iraqi Government have sought to play down the violations committed by occupation troops — either by recalling that similar abuses were committed under Saddam's regime or by labelling the victims as terrorists.

Last week, leaders of the Supreme Council of Islamic Revolution in Iraq accused the police of torturing and killing three of their members because of their political and religious affiliations, and demanded an immediate investigation.

Facing these daily atrocities, what do we expect an oppressed Iraqi to do?

(Haifa Zangana is an Iraqi-born novelist and former prisoner of the Saddam regime.)

## Despite the election, ordinary Iraqis face a daily struggle to survive attacks, kidnappings, killings.

body was found. To the bewilderment of his family, U.S. troops stopped them after they had collected the body, uncovered it and took photos.

Hazim was not a "terrorist" or a "Saddamist." He was a cheerful family man who was wounded in the Iran-Iraq war, and survived the harshness of the sanctions years by selling fruit and vegetables. Who is going to investigate his killing, compensate his family, and help his children to make sense of their tragedy? Will it be the Iraqi interim government, or the U.S.-led occupation?

Judging by the human rights records of both, the answer is that neither of them will investigate Hazim's killing, or any other. Human rights under occupation have proved to be

# Italy livid at US as wounded hostage arrives

Agencies

Baghdad/Rome, March 5

A FREED hostage from Iraq, Giuliana Sgrena arrived home in Rome on Saturday as Italians demanded to know why US forces shot at her car as it approached Baghdad airport, wounding her and killing an Italian secret agent.

Sgrena looked in pain as she was helped off a plane and into a military ambulance. The reporter, who was treated for a wound in Iraq, clutched a plaid blanket around her shoulders and was attached to a drip.

Italy is to award a posthumous award for valour to secret service agent Nicola Calipari who was instrumental in gaining Sgrena's release and then saved her life by acting as a human shield as the car was riddled with bullets.

Two other secret agents in the car were also wounded. One returned to Rome with Sgrena, the other is being treated in Iraq. Sgrena was whisked to an Italian military hospital where a wound in her collarbone will be operated on.

The shooting turned Italian joy at Sgrena's release on Friday evening to anger and concern and sparked a diplomatic incident. Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi took the rare step of summoning the US ambassador to explain what had happened.

Sgrena (57) was hit in the shoulder with shrapnel but the wound was not thought to be serious. Berlusconi said he was "flabbergasted" by the shooting. "I believe we must have an explanation for such a serious incident. Someone must take the responsibility," he said.

He said he personally knew Calipari who had worked on previous hostage release cases in Iraq. "He was an extraordinary man, a man who gave me the certainty that Giuliana would come home. When I learned he had been killed by American soldiers, I felt pain that for a moment overshadowed the joy of Giuliana's liberation." The man, a former policeman, was also known to Sgrena's partner Pier Scolari who he met in the days running up to her release.

America said it regretted the killing. "We regret the loss of life. The incident is under investigation," a White House spokesman said.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

06 MAR 2005

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## JUDGE KILLED

### Another victim of insurgency in Iraq

**T**HE latest victim of Iraq's "insurgency" is a judge and his lawyer son, both working as quislings for the Iraqi special tribunal, set up to try Saddam Hussein and top lieutenants. The father and son were killed as they were leaving for work. The situation is deteriorating. While President Bush and his cohorts continue to pat themselves on the back, with claims of bringing democracy to Iraq, the country is increasingly affected by kidnappings, killings, suicide bombings and assassinations. And there is a single person and his megalomania that is responsible — George W Bush. The broken country has come to the end of the road. And 'insurgency' can be brought under control only by a genuinely free government, not a puppet of the USA. This cannot happen until the Americans give up and leave altogether.

Bush must understand that guerrillas are fighting to overthrow the sham pro-US government, and they are not afraid to die in the process. All talk of democracy and freedom is rejected as a sham. The judge and his son were pawns in the same game, and they died because they were easier targets than American soldiers. There are 50 other members of the so-called special group who are all potential targets. The civilian death toll of the war, both at the hands of US soldiers and insurgents has been huge, so much so that neither Bush nor any of his cronies have dared to release even a tentative figure. We hear only of those US and allied soldiers who lose their lives in the liberation struggle, but not a word is said of Iraqi casualties which must be horrendous. On Monday, a suicide bombing claimed 125 civilian lives — deadliest single attack since Saddam's overthrow. The US is desperate to find groups of people it can blame. Sometimes it is the former members of the Baath Party, or Sunni insurgents, or Shia rebels or now it is the Iraq branch of the Al Qaida at whose door the blame is laid. But it is never placed where it rightly belongs. Even now after bringing a country to its knees, and utterly without cause, Bush does not see the writing on the wall. The message he is getting is the same — leave Iraq! How long can he resist and bleed to death as a result?

# Judge in Saddam tribunal killed

**MARIAM KAROUNY**  
BAGHDAD, MARCH 2

**G**UNMEN in Baghdad shot and killed a judge working for the Iraqi special tribunal set up to try Saddam Hussein and his top lieutenants, Interior Ministry officials said on Wednesday.

Two car bombs in the capital killed 13 Iraqi soldiers and wounded dozens in the latest attacks targeting Iraq's security forces. Judge Barawiz Mahmud and his son, who worked as a lawyer, were shot dead as they left their home in northern Baghdad on Tuesday.

"He was working in the special tribunal. He was involved in cases including Saddam's," one ministry official said. It was not clear whether his killing was connected to his work at the tribunal, and police said they were investigating.

It was the first assassination



**US soldiers pass a man wounded in an attack in Baghdad on Wednesday.** Reuters

evidence to put five former Baath party officials on trial, including Saddam's half brother Barzan Ibrahim al-Hassan al-Tikriti and former Deputy Prime Minister Ishaq Yasin Ramadan.

The trial is not expected to begin for at least another

seven weeks. Saddam, who briefly appeared before a judge last July, is expected to be tried next year on war crimes charges.

Iraqi officials involved with the special tribunal say they hope trials of Saddam's top deputies will help build a case against the former dictator.

One of Wednesday's car bomb blasts in Baghdad was outside an Iraqi Army base used as a recruitment centre. Six soldiers were killed and 38 people were wounded, police said. A second car bomb targeted a convoy of Iraqi soldiers, killing seven and wounding two, police said.

General John Abizaid, head of US Central Command, told the Senate Armed Services Committee, improved Iraqi intelligence and "treason within his own organisation" had led to successes against Zarqawi. "His days in Iraq are numbered," Abizaid said. —Reuters

## 'US worries Saddam could win support'

**REUTERS**  
TOKYO, MARCH 2

THE United States may be restricting access to former Iraqi President Saddam Hussein for fear his comments could bolster support for him in the Arab world, a lawyer for the deposed leader said on Wednesday.

Ziad Khasawneh, the spokesman for Saddam's defence team, said "I have in my office a lot of papers... (asking) why I defend President Saddam," Khasawneh said during a visit to Japan.

Meanwhile, Ukraine plans to start bringing its 1,600 troops home from Iraq, with complete withdrawal by October 15, President Viktor Yushchenko said. —Reuters



# Car bomb kills 115 in Iraq

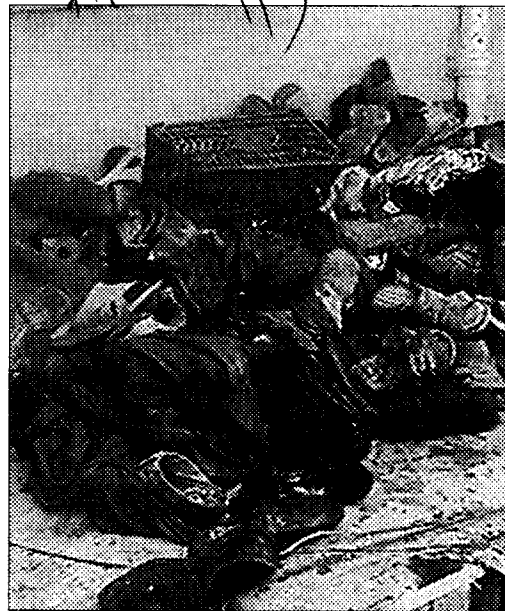
Associated Press  
Hillah (Iraq), February 28

A SUICIDE car bomber blasted a crowd of police and national guard recruits on Monday as they gathered for physicals outside a medical clinic south of Baghdad. The bomber left at least 115 people dead and 133 injured — the single deadliest attack in the two-year insurgency. A second car bomb exploded at a police checkpoint in Musayyib, about 20 miles north of Hillah, killing at least one policeman and wounding several others, police said on condition of anonymity.

Torn limbs and other body parts littered the street outside the clinic in Hillah, a predominantly Shia area about 60 miles south of Baghdad. The blast outside the clinic was so powerful that it nearly vapourised the suicide bomber's car, leaving only its engine partially intact. The injured were piled into pickup trucks and ambulances and taken to nearby hospitals.

Outside the concrete and brick building, people gingerly walked around small lakes of blood that pooled on the street. Scorch marks infused with blood covered the clinic's walls and dozens of people helped pile body parts, including arms, feet and limbs, into blankets. Piles of shoes and tattered clothes were thrown into a corner.

Babil province police headquarters said "several people" were arrested in connection with the blast, the biggest confirmed death toll in a single attack since the fall of Saddam Hussein. Insurgents have repeatedly targeted recruits for Iraq's security forces and this attack comes at a time when Iraqi



Clothes and shoes are scattered at the site of the blast in Hillah, southern Baghdad, on Monday.

politicians are trying to form a new government.

Iraq's interim PM, Ayad Allawi, wrote in *The Wall Street Journal* on Monday that Iraq still needed international forces on the ground while the effort was underway to rebuild her security forces.

# Iran wants US to keep out of EU nuke talks

**Bush in Slovakia to muster support for coaxing Tehran into abandoning its nuclear programme**

**AGENCIES**  
TEHRAN/BRATISLAVA, FEBRUARY 24

IRAN said on Thursday it did not want the United States to become more involved in negotiations Tehran is holding with the European Union over its nuclear programme, while President George W. Bush said he hoped for a diplomatic solution now that Europe and Washington were "on the same page" on the issue.

"The Islamic Republic of Iran does not see any reason why the United States should join the negotiations between the three European

countries and Iran on its nuclear programme," Iran's foreign ministry spokesman Hamid Reza Asefi said. "America's strategy is clear and it revolves around Israel. If America joins these negotiations they wouldn't make it any better, more like it would be worse," the official IRNA news agency quoted Asefi as saying. "I hope the European countries continue to act independently in the negotiations," he added.

European leaders, including French President Jacques Chirac and German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder, urged US President George W. Bush this week to join the EU approach of offering incentives to Iran in return for scrapping some atomic work.

European diplomats privately acknowledge that talks with Iran are unlikely to succeed unless Washington throws its full weight behind them since many of the possible incentives for Iran would need United



Bush with the First Lady in Bratislava. Reuters photo

## Syria to cooperate with UN on pullout

**DAMASCUS:** Syria said on Thursday it was keen to cooperate with the United Nations to implement a resolution requiring the Arab state to pull its troops out of Lebanon. "Syria expresses its keen interest in cooperating with the envoy of the secretary-general of the United Nations to accomplish his mission in the best formula possible," Syrian Deputy Foreign Minister Waleed al-Mualem said. He said a troop withdrawal would first require stronger Lebanese security forces. —Reuters

States backing. Iran has frozen uranium enrichment, which can be used to make bomb-grade fuel, while the European Union talks go on.

But it has said it will review the freeze in mid-March and refuses to

contemplate scrapping enrichment for good as the European Union and Washington want.

"Hopefully we'll be able to reach a diplomatic solution," Bush told reporters after talks with Slovak Prime Minister Mikulas Dzurinda in Bratislava. "I know we're all on the same page on this issue."

"We have a common objective which is to convince the Ayatollahs not to have a nuclear weapon and I'm going to go back and think about the suggestions I've heard and the ways forward. But the key thing is that we are united in the goal," the US President said.

"The most effective way to achieve that goal is to have our partners Britain and France and Germany represent not only the European Union, not only North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, but the United States. And hopefully we'll be able to reach a diplomatic solution to this," Bush said.

## Iran rejects U.S., U.N. aid

By Atul Aneja

HD 1A  
MANAMA, FEB. 23. Amid driving rain and snow, rescue and relief teams are heading towards remote mountainous areas affected by Tuesday's massive earthquake, which hit parts of southeast Iran.

The official Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA), citing local officials, said the death toll now stood at 459.

The quake injured another 900 people. IRNA quoted the Interior Minister, Abdolvahed Mousavi-Lari, as saying that the death toll would probably rise to 500.

At least 27 more bodies have been found in Houtkan, bringing the total number of deaths

in the village alone to 150, AFP news agency reported.

### Two women rescued

Rescue workers, however, managed to pull alive two women who were trapped under the masonry in the village, more than 24 hours after the temblor struck. One of them, who emerged nearly uninjured, said she had stood under the frame of a door soon after feeling the tremors. At least 11 Iranian rescue teams have moved to the quake zone. Notwithstanding the devastation, Iran has rejected offers of American and U.N. aid for the quake victims. Iranian Red Crescent workers have been moving people to nearby towns and cities in Kerman

24/2  
province. They also worked with mountain rescue teams and sniffer dogs in order to detect signs of life under the rubble.

Tuesday's earthquake had a magnitude of 6.4 magnitude and its epicentre was close to the town of Zarand, 740 km from Teheran.

The area is 200 km away from the ancient city of Bam which was partially destroyed by a quake in 2003, causing more than 30,000 casualties.

Reuters news agency reported that few dozen angry villagers besieged a convoy of vehicles, one of which carried the Interior Minister, complaining that relief teams were yet to come to their aid.

## Iran seeks India's support on nuclear issue

By Indrani Bagchi/TNN

New Delhi: Even as George W Bush set foot in Europe with his latest attack against Iran developing nuclear weapons, Iranian foreign minister Kamal Kharazzi was here requesting for Indian 'cooperation' in Iran's ordeals with the world nuclear community.

During his hour-long delegation meeting followed by a one-on-one interaction with foreign minister Natwar Singh on Monday, Kharazzi reiterated Iran's view that it would continue with developing its capabilities in nuclear technology. Iran is also playing the developing country card, opposing what it calls the 'targeting' of developing countries through the review of the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty scheduled for later this year.

Iran is well aware that India is not a member of the NPT. But it is a clear way of



Iranian foreign minister Kamal Kharazzi with external affairs minister Natwar Singh in New Delhi on Monday

gathering friends and supporters on this issue particularly as there is a general belief that the forthcoming review would come down hard on members like Iran and North Korea which have violated the treaty.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

23 FEB 2006

# Nato one on Iraq training

Associated Press

## Man charged for Bush death plot

BRUSSELS, Feb. 22. — President Bush today welcomed a commitment from all the Nato countries to contribute to an alliance mission to train Iraq's military — a decision designed to symbolise the end to the bitter divisions wrought by the Iraq war.

"Twenty-six nations sitting around that table said it's important for Nato to be involved, that's a strong statement," Mr Bush told a news conference. "Nato is involved in Iraq and it's doing a vital mission which is to help an officer corps emerge."

Nato has been struggling for months to get allies to commit troops and money needed for the mission to train Iraqi troops. At today's summit, officials said they now had the 160 instructors and 200 guards and support staff needed for the current phase of the mission

ALEXANDRIA (Virginia), Feb. 22. — A man who spent time in a Saudi prison as a suspected terrorist was today charged with conspiring to assassinate President Bush and conspiracy to support the Al-Qaida terror network.

Ahmed Omar Abu Ali (23), a US citizen, made an initial appearance today in US District Court but did not enter a plea. He contended that he was tortured while detained in Saudi Arabia since June of 2003 and offered through his lawyer to show the judge his scars.

The federal indictment said that in 2002 and 2003 Abu Ali and an unidentified co-conspirator discussed plans for Abu Ali to assassinate Mr Bush. They discussed two scenarios, the indictment said, one in which Abu Ali "would get close enough to the President to shoot him on the street" and, alternatively, "an operation in which Abu Ali would detonate a car bomb". The White House had no comment on the indictment. — AP

in Baghdad.

"We are united in our commitment," the 26 alliance leaders said in a joint statement.

However, in a sign of lingering differences, France, Germany and other opponents to the Iraq war will not send instructors to Iraq. Instead, they are limiting their contribution to funding for the operation or training outside the country.

## EU proposal

The EU, concluding a summit meeting with Mr Bush, today offered to stage a conference to rally international support for Iraq together with the USA. The meeting would "provide a forum to encourage and coordinate international support for Iraq", Luxembourg Prime Minister Mr Jean-Claude Juncker, the summit host, said.

# Shias pick Al-Jaafari as Iraq PM

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Associated Press  
Baghdad, February 22

INTERIM IRAQI Vice-President Ibrahim al-Jaafari was chosen as his Shia party's candidate for the post of Prime Minister on Tuesday after Ahmad Chalabi dropped his bid, senior alliance officials said.

Al-Jaafari's selection means he likely will lead Iraq's first democratically elected government in 50 years. But first he has to be approved by a coalition that likely will include the Kurds, and then he must be approved by a majority of the newly elected National Assembly.

Pressure from within the ranks of the United Iraqi Alliance, which won Iraq's landmark January 30 election, forced the withdrawal of Chalabi, a one-time Pentagon favourite, said Hussein al-Moussawi from the Shia Political Council, an umbrella group for 38 Shia parties.

"They wanted him to withdraw. They didn't want to push the vote to a secret ballot," al-Moussawi said.

The 140 members were to put the decision between Chalabi and al-Jaafari to a secret ballot by Tuesday's end.

The decision came after three days of round-the-clock negotiations by senior members of the clergy-backed alliance, which emerged from the election with a 140-seat majority in the 275-member National Assembly, or parliament.

The office of Abdel Aziz al-Hakim, leader of the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq, or SCIRI, confirmed that Chalabi had withdrawn his bid to be Prime Minister.

"Chalabi announced his withdrawal and everyone agreed on al-Jaafari. Then Chalabi declared his support to al-Jaa-

— in the landmark election.

The United Iraqi Alliance took 48 per cent of the vote last month but needs to form a coalition with smaller parties to form the new government.

Kurdish parties, who won 26 per cent, have indicated in the past they would support the Shia candidate for prime minister in return for support for their candidate for the presidency.

The assembly must approve candidates for the presidency and two vice presidencies by a two-thirds majority. The President and Vice-Presidents, in turn, will nominate a Prime Minister, who must be approved by a simple majority of the assembly. The assembly also will draft a constitution.

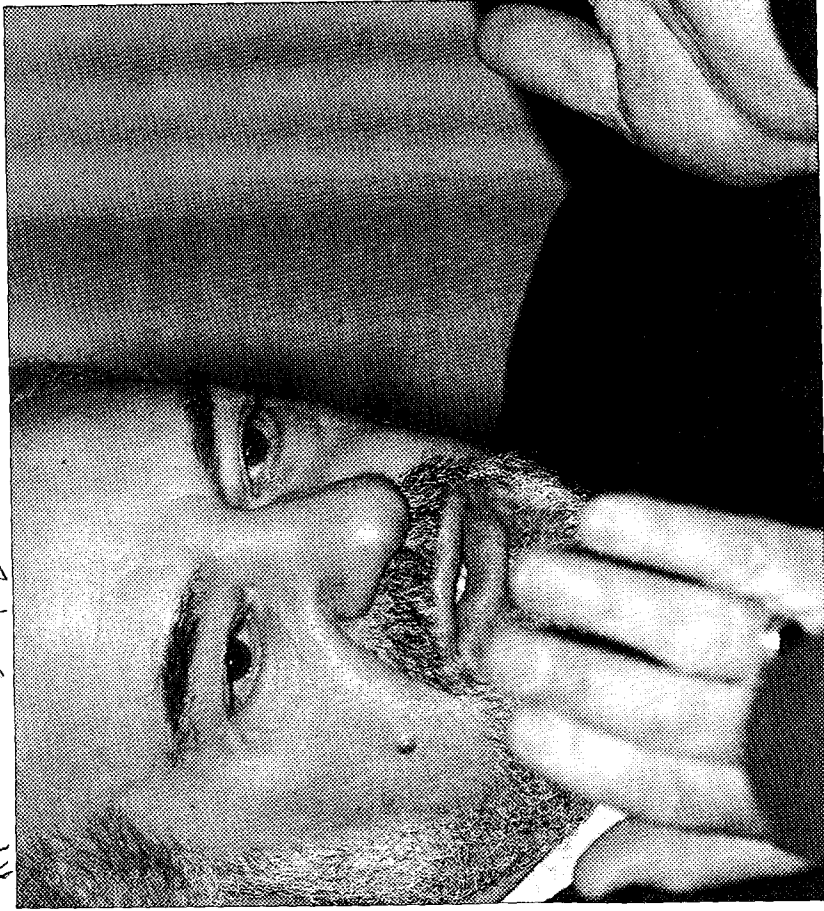
A date for the parliament's opening has not been set.

The conservative Al-Jaafari, a 58-year-old family doctor, is the main spokesman for the Islamic Dawa Party, which waged a bloody campaign against Saddam Hussein's regime in the late 1970s. Saddam crushed the campaign in 1982 and Dawa based itself in Iran.

In an interview last week, he said the most pressing issues for the nation were improving security and improving the standards of its social services.

Al-Jaafari also said calling for the immediate withdrawal of coalition troops would be a "mistake" given the lack of security in Iraq.

The secular Chalabi is a former exile leader who heavily promoted the idea that Saddam had weapons of mass destruction. He later fell out with some key members of the Bush administration over allegations that he passed secret



AP

Ibrahim al-Jaafari talks to the media after being declared prime ministerial nominee.

fari," said Haytham al Husaini, a top al-Hakim aide. SCIRI, the main group making up the alliance, tried for days to persuade Chalabi to quit the race, some of its senior officials said.

Al-Jaafari's only other likely opponent for the post would be interim Prime Minister Ayad Allawi, who was nominated for the job by his group. The Iraqi party got only 14 per cent of the vote — or 40 seats



**WHEN THE EARTH SHOOK:** The Tuesday temblor that shook the mountainous region of southeast Iran robbed this man and woman in a village of their home and family. — Reuters

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# Earthquake kills 500 in Iran

By Atul Aneja

**MANAMA, FEB. 22.** A powerful earthquake today killed at least 500 people and injured 1,000 in south-east Iran.

The quake, which measured 6.4 on the Richter scale, was centred near Zarand in the Kerman province. The area is about 200 km north-west of Bam, the historic city that was hit by a massive earthquake in 2003, causing over 30,000 deaths.

Iranian authorities say that nearly 70 per cent of the buildings in six villages around Zarand have either been damaged or destroyed. The temblor has caused extensive damage in three villages, one of which is still inaccessible because a landslide triggered by the quake has blocked the way. Reports from Teheran say that many in

this village of 1,500 were participating in a religious ceremony when the quake struck. It is feared that many of them have been buried under the rubble.

## Substantial damage

"Figures we have show that in the early hours more than 1,000 were injured and almost 400 killed," said Ali Komsari, a spokesperson for the Kerman provincial Governor's office.

The Zarand Governor, Javad Rashidi, said the death toll stood at 130. "But there is a possibility for the figure to rise to 500," he told the semi-official ISNA students news agency. Iranian television later said that 500 people died and 96 bodies had been recovered and identified.

Mohammad Ali Karimi, Governor of Kerman province, said

the area affected by the earthquake had a population of about 30,000 in about 40 villages, which had suffered 20 to 90 per cent structural damage.

Iranian officials say that despite the extensive physical devastation, the temblor may have killed relatively less number of people because the affected area was thinly populated.

While villages have faced the brunt, major towns and cities in the area appeared to have escaped heavy damage. "In Zarand and Kerman only some walls have collapsed and there were no casualties," the Interior Ministry spokesman, Jahanbakhsh Khanjani, said.

So far 11 rescue teams have been dispatched to the affected area. A spokesperson for the Geneva-based International

Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, Marie-Francoise Borel, said that three Iranian government planes were carrying relief goods to the stricken area. "For the moment there is no need for international help," she said.

Despite heavy rains, rescue workers have advised people to stay outdoors in anticipation of aftershocks. Already 20 aftershocks have been recorded. Authorities have shut off gas in the area as a precaution, ordered people not to use mobile telephones and closed schools functioning from mud-houses.

Iran is the world's most earthquake prone country, according to the United Nations. Seismologists say that this is because Iran is at the junction of three of the earth's plates.

See also Page 14

# 23 killed in 8 suicide blasts

Associated Press  
Baghdad, February 19

EIGHT SUICIDE bombings in Baghdad and other parts of Iraq killed at least 23 people, including a US soldier, and injured 70 as Shia Muslims around the country celebrated their holiest day in the year.

The attacks came one day after at least 36 people, mostly Shiites, were killed in a string of attacks.

Saturday's bombings, during the religious festival of Ashoura, occurred despite stepped-up security around the country. Authorities had hoped to prevent a repeat of last year's attacks during Ashoura in which insurgent blasts killed at least 181 people in Karbala and Baghdad.

The attacks occurred as a five-member US congressional delegation, including Senators Hillary Clinton and John McCain met with Iraqi government officials in Baghdad's heavily fortified Green Zone.

"The fact that you have these suicide bombers now, wreaking such hatred and violence while people pray, is to me, an indication of their failure," Clinton said.

Iraqi police said they made some headway against the ongoing insurgency, arresting two of its leaders, including a high-ranking

aide to Iraqi al-Qaeda leader Abu Musab al-Zarqawi.

The suspects allegedly played key roles in the insurgency in Baqouba and Mosul. Nearly all of Saturday's attacks inside Baghdad took place in the northern Adhamiya and Kadhamiya districts. It was unclear which Baghdad attack killed the US soldier, whose identity was withheld by the military. Another soldier was wounded in that attack, which killed an Iraqi, the military said.

The string of blasts started when a suicide bomber walked into a tent outside a Sunni mosque in Baghdad and blew himself up, killing at least three people and injuring 10, police captain Hussain al-Ani said. About 50 people were inside the tent attending a funeral.

It was unclear why the attacker blew himself up inside a tent full of Sunnis outside the Fatah Pasha mosque, but similar structures were set up outside Shia mosques.

## 'Take another look'

Meanwhile, John Negroponte, just nominated as the first US intelligence chief, on Friday asked UN members to "take another look" at what they could do to help Iraq, including training the military.



# Shia alliance secures slim majority in Iraq

Baghdad, Feb. 17 (Reuters): Iraq's Shia alliance won a slim majority of seats in the new National Assembly, the Electoral Commission said today, securing them power after decades of domination by minority Sunnis.

Based on final results from last month's historic election, the United Iraqi Alliance, a coalition of mainly Shia Islamist religious parties, was allocated 140 seats in the 275-seat National Assembly, the Electoral Commission said.

Seventy-five seats went to a Kurdish bloc that polled the second highest number of votes in the January 30 ballot. Many Sunni Arabs failed to vote through a combination of boycott and fear of Sunni insurgents battling the US-backed administration.

An alliance leader seen as a potential Prime Minister said Sunnis must now take part in drafting a constitution, however. Otherwise, some fear, sectarian tension could

become civil war.

A two-thirds majority is required to approve the appointment of a President and two vice-presidents, the next step in the electoral process. The Shia alliance and Kurdish bloc are expected to work together to form such a majority.

The three-person presidency will name a Prime Minister and a cabinet. The alliance's Ibrahim al-Jaafari, who is front-runner to be Prime Minister, said the nomination had yet to be decided and that talks on the top jobs would take "a couple more days".

A group led by the present, interim, Prime Minister, Iyad Allawi, a secular Shia, won 40 seats in the election. The election dramatically shifted power to the majority Shias who watched many Sunnis enjoy considerable privileges under Saddam Hussein. Some fear the transition of power could stoke sectarian tensions and fuel the Sunni-led insurgency.

Leading figures have said the cabinet should include Sunnis and Jaafari stressed that it was crucial they get involved in drawing up a constitution, the new parliament's main task: "We cannot consider the constitution as complete and perfect unless all Iraqis participate in its drafting," Jaafari said.

US military officers and Iraqi officials do not expect the election, which drew an unexpectedly high turnout of 58 per cent, to defuse the revolt by Saddam loyalists and militant Islamists.

The alliance polled around 48 per cent of the national vote — some way less than the 60 per cent they had hoped for. The Kurds won almost 26 per cent and Allawi around 14 per cent. Because dozens of parties failed to muster enough votes to gain any seats, those parties that were elected to parliament have a larger share of seats than their share of the vote.

The results came as Shias mark Ashura, an annual ritual that honours the 7th century death of Mohammad's grandson. At Ashura last year, 170 people were killed by suicide bombers in Karbala and Baghdad. This year, authorities are again bracing for suicide bombings against Shias during the event.

Whoever is chosen Prime Minister faces the daunting task of improving security in a country plagued by suicide bombings and kidnappings — a videotape was released yesterday showing an Italian journalist snatched on February 4 pleading for her life. Insurgents also released a video showing a kidnapped Iraqi Swede pleading to the king and queen of Sweden to work for his release.

President George W. Bush announced that his ambassador to Iraq, John Negroponte, would move to the new position of director of national intelligence.

# Shias manage slim majority, seek allies

## *Kurds emerge as kingmakers, Sunnis may get taste of power*

Agencies  
Baghdad, February 17 *REC-15*

IRAQ'S SHIA alliance won a slim majority of seats in the country's new National Assembly, the Iraqi electoral Commission said on Thursday.

Based on final results from last month's historic election, the United Iraqi Alliance, a coalition of mainly Shia Islamist religious parties, was allocated 140 seats in the 275-seat National Assembly. A combined Kurdish bloc, which polled the second highest number of votes in the January 30 ballot, won 75 seats and the list led by US-backed interim Prime Minister Iyad Allawi, a secular Shia, got 40 seats.

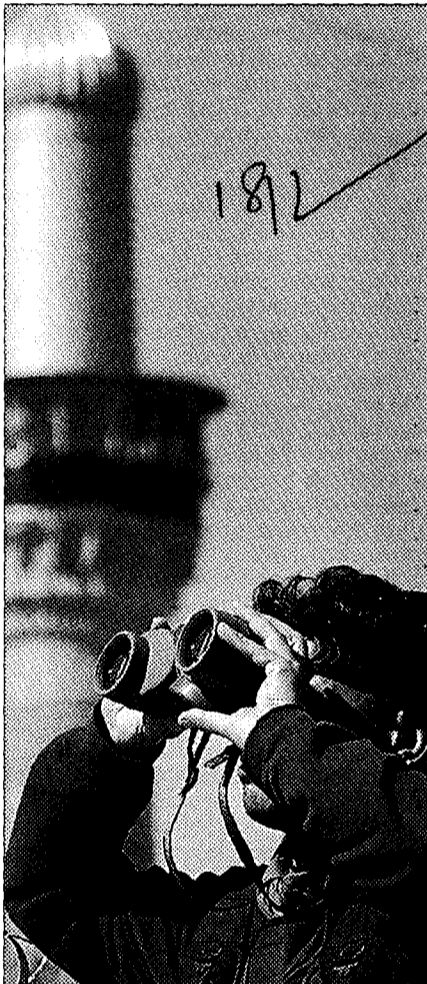
A redistribution of the votes from the 99 parties that did not win enough support to get parliament seats gave the Shia alliance control of more than half of the assembly's 275 seats, even though they received slightly less than half the vote. It appeared only 12 party groupings would take seats.

A two-thirds majority is required to approve the appointment of a President and two Vice-Presidents, the next step in the electoral process. The Shia alliance and Kurdish bloc could together form such a majority and are expected to do so.

Kurdish parties have agreed to support the alliance's candidate for PM in return for the largely ceremonial presidency. But officials said they would not accept a theocratic government. "We will reject and we won't allow the establishment of a theocratic state; we want separation between religion and state," said Noshirwan Mustafa, a Kurdish leader.

However, leading figures have said the Cabinet should include members of Saddam Hussein's Sunni Arab minority, many of whom did not vote, because of boycotts or fears of violence from the anti-American insurgents active in the main Sunni regions. Around 8.5 million votes were cast, representing a turnout of some 58 percent of the more than 14 million eligible voters. The Alliance polled around 48 per cent of the national vote — somewhat less than the 60 per cent they had hoped for. The Kurds won almost 26 per cent and Allawi around 14 per cent.

Once the assembly approves a Presidential council consisting of the President and two Vice-Presidents, this in turn will decide on a prime minister and a Cabinet. All those appointments are currently being worked out and are expected to be announced together. The certification sets the stage for the first meeting of the National Assembly, which will have 10 months to draft a new constitution. The current appointed government will now set a date for installing the new elected government. Shia politicians have agreed to choose their nominee for PM through a secret ballot on Friday to decide a two-man race between Ibrahim al-Jaafari and Ahmad Chalabi.



AP  
A cop keeps watch in Baghdad on Thursday as election results trickle in.

### New job for Iraq linkman

PRESIDENT BUSH on Thursday named John Negroponte, a former US ambassador to the UN and currently the administration's top representative in Iraq, to be America's first national intelligence director.

Bush said Negroponte understands global intelligence needs because he's had a long career in the foreign service. "John will make sure those whose duty it is to defend US have the information we need to make the right decisions," Bush said. "We're going to stop the terrorists before they strike." Negroponte called the new job "the most challenging assignment I have undertaken in 40 years of service."

AP, Washington

18 FEB 2005

## ইরাক: বাকি অনেক পথ

নির্বাচনের পর ইরাকে গণতান্ত্রিক শাসনব্যবস্থা কায়েমের প্রক্রিয়াও শুরু হইয়াছে। এ কথা ঠিক যে নির্বাচনে আশানুরূপ ভোট পড়ে নাই। একই সঙ্গে এ কথাও মনে রাখা দরকার যে, অর্ধ শতাব্দী পরে এই প্রথম ইরাকে অবাধ নির্বাচন অনুষ্ঠিত হইয়াছে, যাহাতে প্রায় অর্ধেক মানুষ যোগ দিয়াছেন। বিগত পঞ্চাশ বছর ধরিয়া বাথ পার্টির একনায়কত্ব শাসনব্যবস্থায় জনপ্রতিনিধিদের কোনও অবকাশই রাখিত না। নির্বাচনী ফলাফলে শিয়া সম্প্রদায়ের প্রতিনিধি সংযুক্ত ইরাকি মোর্চাই গরিষ্ঠের রায় পাইয়াছে। ইহা এমনিতে অতিশয় তাৎপর্যপূর্ণ। শিয়ারা ইরাকের জনসংখ্যার ষাট শতাংশ। অথচ ১৯২০ সালে অটোমান সাম্রাজ্যের ভগ্নভূপ হইতে ব্রিটেন কর্তৃক বর্তমান অবয়বে জন্মগ্রহণের পর হইতে ইরাক শাসনের অধিকার কখনওই শিয়াদের হাতে আসে নাই। শিয়া সম্প্রদায় স্বভাবতই উল্লসিত। এই নির্বাচনে যেমন তাহাদের অংশগ্রহণ ছিল সোৎসাহ, তেমনই নির্বাচনপ্রসূত সরকার গঠন ও তাহা টিকাইয়া রাখার ক্ষেত্রেও তাহাদের দায় অন্যদের অপেক্ষা বেশি। সাদ্দাম হুসেনের একনায়কত্বে বীতশ্রদ্ধ কুর্দ জনজাতির মানুষও ভোট দিয়াছেন উৎসাহভরে। শিয়া-কুর্দ কোয়ালিশনই হইতে চলিয়াছে ইরাকের ভাবী সরকারের চেহারা।

আর এখানেই রকমারি অশনি-সংকেত বলসাইতেছে। শিয়া-শাসিত ইরানের সংলগ্ন ইরাকেও শিয়া প্রাধান্য আখেরে পশ্চিম এশিয়ায় মার্কিন রণনীতির পক্ষে কোনও সুসমাচার বহন করে না। সংযুক্ত ইরাকি মোর্চার আধ্যাত্মিক গুরু এখনও আয়াতোল্লা আলি আল-সিন্তানি। তিনি কোনও ধর্মনিরপেক্ষ ব্যক্তি নন। ইরানের মোল্লাতন্ত্রের সহিত তাহার কোনও বিবাদ নাই। শুধু তাহাই নহে, মোর্চার প্রধানমন্ত্রী প্রার্থী পদে যাঁহার মনোনীত হইবার সম্ভাবনা সর্বাধিক, সেই ইব্রাহিম আল-জাফরি শিয়া ধর্মীয় দল 'দাওয়া' পার্টির নেতা। তাহার প্রতিদ্বন্দ্বী আদেল আবদুল মাহদি সাদ্দাম জমানায় ইরানে আশ্রয় লইয়া সেখানকার ইসলামি বিপ্লবে পরিণয় যোগদান করিয়াছিলেন, সেখানকার সুপ্রিম কাউন্সিলেরও সদস্য ছিলেন। সম্প্রতি সুন্নি বিদ্রোহীদের সন্ত্রাসে নাজেহাল হইলেও ইরাকের অন্তর্বর্তী সরকার ও তাহার মার্কিন প্রভুদের কিন্তু শিয়া জঙ্গিরাও কম বেগ দেখু নাই। মুজ্তাদা আল-সদরের নেতৃত্বে যে শিয়া বিদ্রোহ মার্কিন দখলদারির বিরুদ্ধেই দানা বাঁধিয়াছিল, আল-সিন্তানির মধ্যস্থতায় বহু কষ্টে তাহার ইতি ঘটিলেও শিয়া উগ্রপন্থা ইরানের ইন্ধনে আবার মাথা চাড়া দিবে না, এমন নিশ্চয়তা নাই। ইতিমধ্যেই ইরাককে ইসলামি প্রজাতন্ত্রে রূপান্তরিত করার এবং শরিয়ত তথা ইসলামি আইন প্রবর্তন করার দাবি উঠিয়াছে। পরমাণু অস্ত্র নির্মাণের প্রচেষ্টার অভিযোগে ইরানের বিরুদ্ধে অর্থনৈতিক অবরোধ কিংবা সামরিক অভিযান চালাইবার মার্কিন উদ্যোগ ইরাকের শিয়া শাসকদের বিরূপ করিয়া তুলিতে পারে।

অন্য সমস্যাও আছে। সুন্নি সম্প্রদায় জনসংখ্যার কুড়ি শতাংশ হওয়া সত্ত্বেও তাহাদের বয়কটের ফলে ২৭৫ সদস্যের জাতীয় প্রতিনিধিসভায় মাত্র পাঁচ জন সুন্নি প্রতিনিধি নির্বাচিত হইয়াছেন। ফলে সরকারে সুন্নিদের প্রতিনিধিদের সম্ভাবনা সুদূর। এত কাল অযৌক্তিক ভাবে সংখ্যালঘু সুন্নিরা দেশ শাসনের অধিকার ভোগ করিলেও আজ এমন সার্বিক ক্ষমতাচ্যুতি তাহাদের কাছে ঐতিহাসিক প্রতিশোধ বা প্রায়শ্চিত্ত বলিয়া গণ্য হইতে পারে। তাহা একটি মদগর্ভী জনগোষ্ঠীর মনে যে মর্মদাহ সৃষ্টি করে, বিগত শতাব্দীর ইউরোপের ইতিহাসে তাহার ভয়ংকর পরিণামের সাক্ষ্য রহিয়াছে। তাই গোটা সুন্নি জনগোষ্ঠীকে সাদ্দাম হুসেনের অনুরাগী বা আল-কায়দার সমর্থক রূপে শনাক্ত করিয়া শাসনপ্রণালী হইতে নির্বাসিত করা বুদ্ধিমানের কাজ হইবে না। সম্ভাব্য প্রধানমন্ত্রী শিয়া নেতা ইব্রাহিম আল-জাফরি তাই হুঁশিয়ারি দিয়াছেন, সুন্নিদের শাসনব্যবস্থার শরিক করিয়া না লইলে তাহাদের আল-কায়দার দিকেই ঠেলিয়া দেওয়া হইবে। তা ছাড়া ইরাকের জায়মান গণতন্ত্রও তাহাতে প্রথমাবধি বিকৃত ও খণ্ডিত থাকিবে। তিন স্বতন্ত্র জনগোষ্ঠী অধ্যুষিত ইরাকের ভবিষ্যৎ সরকারের রূপরেখা নির্দেশ করিতে গিয়া অনেকেই তাই শিয়া প্রধানমন্ত্রী, কুর্দ প্রেসিডেন্ট ও সুন্নি স্পিকার-এর সূত্র প্রণয়ন করিতেছেন। সদ্য নির্বাচিত জাতীয় প্রতিনিধিসভাকে ১৫ অগস্টের মধ্যে খসড়া সংবিধান রচনা করিতে হইবে, যাহা গণভোটে অনুমোদিত হওয়া চাই। অতঃপর বর্ষশেষের আগেই সাধারণ নির্বাচন। তবেই ইরাকে গণতন্ত্রের পথে দৃঢ়াঙ্কিত পদবিক্ষেপের সূচনা। এখনও অনেক পথ বাকি।

ANADABAZAR PATRIKA

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# Israel hints military action against Iran to stall nukes

Agencies

London/Washington, February 16

IRAN IS six months away from having the knowledge to build a nuclear bomb, Israeli Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom said on Wednesday.

Israel, believed to be West Asia's only nuclear power, has hinted it could hit Iran militarily to stop it getting the bomb. "They are trying very hard to develop the nuclear bomb. This kind of extreme regime with a nuclear bomb is a nightmare, not only for us," Shalom said.

"The question is not if the Iranians will have a nuclear bomb in 2009, 10 or 11, the main question is when are they going to have the knowledge to do it. We believe that in six months from today they will end all the tests and experiments they are doing to have that knowledge," Shalom said on a visit to London.

Iran, which has said its nuclear program is for energy needs only, has warned it would both retaliate and accelerate its drive to master nuclear technology if the United States or Israel attacked its atomic facilities.

The chief of Israel's Mossad intelligence agency said in January that Iran was on the brink of enriching uranium, a process key to building a nuclear bomb.

"Iran is involved in many terrorist attacks in our region," Shalom said. "We should do everything to isolate the hard-liners and empower the moderates."

France, Britain and Germany have tried in talks with Iran to persuade the oil-rich country to drop its nuclear fuel-making program in return for economic incentives.

Meanwhile, there is no evidence to support the claim that Iran is developing nuclear weapons, the head of the UN nuclear

## Tehran's threat

IRAN'S INTELLIGENCE chief on Wednesday accused the US of flying spy drones over its nuclear sites and threatened to shoot down the unmanned surveillance crafts. Intelligence Minister Ali Yunesi's comments backed a report in *The Washington Post* on Sunday that quoted unidentified US officials as saying the drones have been flying over Iran for nearly a year to seek evidence of nuclear weapons programs.

"Most of the shining objects that our people see in Iran's airspace are American spying equipment used to spy on Iran's nuclear and military facilities," the minister said. "Our nuclear activities are open and very transparent. Our military activities are all legal," Yunesi said.

AFP, Tehran

watchdog Mohamed ElBaradei said in an interview published by *The Washington Post*.

"On Iran, there really hasn't been much development, neither as a result of our inspections or as a result of intelligence," said the International Atomic Energy Agency director general.

ElBaradei called for greater US participation in diplomatic efforts to engage Iran and North Korea in talks about their nuclear programs. "North Korea and Iran are still the two 800-pound gorillas in the room and not much is happening," ElBaradei said in Vienna.

The IAEA chief praised

Britain, France and Germany for talking Iran into suspending its nuclear enrichment program for weapons-grade uranium.

"If I look at the big picture," he said, "there is no enrichment in Iran, and this is quite satisfactory, and I hope it keeps this way until we reach an agreement" for a permanent stop.

Iran and the EU embarked in December on negotiations towards a long-term agreement to give Tehran trade, technology and security aid and guarantees in return for it taking steps to reassure the international community that its nuclear program is strictly peaceful.

ElBaradei criticised Washington's refusal to talk with Iran, dismissing the argument this would legitimise Tehran's Islamic government, which the US accuses of supporting terrorism. "I don't see talking to a regime as legitimisation," ElBaradei said. "They talk to North Korea, and I don't think that legitimises the North Korean regime."

He insisted that the only way to end the crisis with Iran was for the United States to join in the talks with its three European allies. "I don't think the Iranian issue will be resolved without the US putting fully its weight behind the Europeans," he said.

On North Korea's announcement last week that it had built nuclear weapons and was pulling out of six-nation talks about its atomic programme, ElBaradei said his agency could not verify Pyongyang's claim since its inspectors in the Stalinist nation were expelled two years ago. However, he considered the North Koreans' announcement a sign that they were feeling ignored: "This is their trump card, and they will try to squeeze every drop of blood out of it."

# Jaafari emerges front-runner for Iraqi PM

Reuters  
Baghdad, February 15

SHIA POLITICIAN and former exile Ibrahim al-Jaafari emerged as the front-runner on Tuesday to become Iraq's new Prime Minister as horse-trading to decide the line-up of the next government entered final stages. Jaafari, a physician, is head of the Dawa Party, one of two leading religious parties in the United Iraqi Alliance, an Islamist Shia-led group which won 48 per cent of the vote in elections on January 30.

"The competition is still fierce but it appears so far that Jaafari will be the United Iraqi Alliance candidate because Dawa is insisting on him," a senior Shia source said.

The diplomatic 58-year-old, who holds the largely ceremonial role of Vice-President in the current interim government, fled Iraq in 1980 after thousands of Dawa members were murdered by Saddam Hussein. His family remains in London. While the alliance did not win the 60 per cent it hoped for, the vote puts the coalition in a commanding position to take the top job in the next government. A two-thirds majority is needed in the newly elected National Assembly to form a government. The alliance, formed with the backing of top

Shia cleric Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, is headed by Dawa and the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq, both of which opposed Saddam from exile in Iran.

The source said SCIRI, led by Abdel-Aziz al-Hakim, had agreed to support Jaafari and withdraw its candidate, finance minister Adel Abdul-Mahdi, "to preserve the unity of the alliance," which some had feared could collapse after the vote. He said a final deal was unlikely Tuesday, with many more details on who gets which jobs still to be worked out.

Analysts expect the Kurds, who took 25 per cent of the vote, to play a key role in the talks as Iraqis look toward a reduction and eventual withdrawal of US troops. The Kurds' powerful showing puts them in a king-maker role — if they combine forces with the Shia alliance, the pair would have more than two-thirds in the assembly and would be able to decide between them who takes what job, including ministries.

The Kurds want Jalal Talabani, head of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, to be Iraq's President and are likely to support the Shia choice for PM if they get their way. While the Shia bloc won less than half the vote, it could end up with about 140 seats in the assembly.



Sunni cleric Harith al-Dari (left) with fellow cleric Subhi Abdel Hamid in Baghdad on Tuesday. AFP

## Sunnis keen to share power

Rory Carroll  
Baghdad, February 15

IRAQ'S ARAB Sunnis will do a U-turn and join the political process despite their lack of representation in the newly elected national assembly, Sunni leaders said late on Monday.

Many Sunnis protested that the election was flawed and unfair, but in the wake of Sunday's results, which confirmed the marginalisation of what was Iraq's ruling class, their political parties want to lobby for a share of power. "This election was a step towards democracy and ending the occupation," said Ayad al-Samaray, the assistant general secretary of the Iraqi Islamic party. He said unnamed Sunni leaders blundered in depicting the election as a deepening of the occupation. The insurgency ravaging Iraq is based in Sunni areas, and there were fears

that the violence would escalate if the once-dominant minority was further alienated.

Having endured the brunt of US attacks in towns such as Falluja and Ramadi, many derided the ballot as an attempt to legitimise a foreign occupation. The consequent landslide for the Shias and Kurds means they will drive the new government and the drafting of a constitution. An alliance of cleric-backed Shias won 48 per cent of the vote, which could give it a majority in the 275-seat assembly. Kurds won 26 per cent, and a slate headed by the outgoing prime minister, Ayad Allawi, won almost 14 per cent. All three parties have promised to reach out to the Sunnis, who won just a handful of seats.

### BEYOND THE BALLOT

# Tehran dubs nuclear weapons un-Islamic

Budapest, February 15

IRAN'S FOREIGN minister said late on Monday that his country has no intention of developing nuclear weapons and does not fear being attacked by the US but could defend itself if needed.

America's fears could be used to manufacture nuclear weapons and is pushing the Europeans to take a tougher line on the issue. Iran, on the other hand, insists its nuclear activities are peaceful.

"Iran does not have any program to produce weapons," foreign minister Kamel Kharrazi said here. "Iran is a promoter of the elimination of nuclear weapons around the world and, based on our ideology, on our Islamic thinking, it is forbidden to produce and use nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction."

Under an agreement reached last year with France, Britain and Germany, Iran suspended its uranium enrichment program during negotiations about European economic, political and technological aid. Tehran has said it will decide soon whether to continue its suspension,

which is monitored by UN nuclear inspectors.

President Bush earlier this month accused Iran of being "the world's primary state sponsor of terror" and of pursuing nuclear weapons. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said last week that an attack was not on the agenda.

Kharrazi said Iran does not believe it will be attacked by the United States, but "if there will be any threat against Iran, certainly we can defend ourselves. I believe it would not be easy to wage war against Iran," he said after a meeting with Hungarian counterpart Ferenc Somogyi.

The foreign minister said that Iran was ready to accept inspections by the International Atomic Energy Agency, adding: "As long as this is the case, there should not be any concerns."

Kharrazi denied that talks with the three European countries were aimed at securing economic advantages for Iran. "It is just to bring more ties between Iran and the EU and to bring more confidence between the two sides."

Agencies

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## SHIA RULE IN IRAQ?

WHILE THE UNITED Iraqi Alliance won the greater share of seats in the newly elected parliament, there is no guarantee that it will take over smoothly from the interim government. This alliance, composed mainly of Shia parties, was cobbled together by the Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani in an effort to harness the full weight of the largest religious community in the country. Given their numbers, there was a chance Shias would be able to wield power for the first time in centuries. The Grand Ayatollah's hope has not been realised in full. While Shias are estimated to constitute about 60 per cent of the country's population, the Alliance got only about 48 per cent of the vote. With the election rules stipulating that alliances or parties will be allotted seats in proportion to their share of the vote, the Alliance might struggle to achieve a simple majority. In fact, this coalition might collapse even before it begins the search for additional support. Two of its major components, Dawa and the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SICRI), have their own candidates for the office of Prime Minister. Even as Dawa's Ibrahim al-Jaafari and SICRI's Adel Abdul Mahdi jostle for pre-eminence, they must keep a wary eye out for the perennial candidate Ahmad Chalabi who is also a member of the coalition. Other candidates, including the current Prime Minister Ayad Allawi whose alliance got about 13 per cent of the vote, would fancy their chances if the Shia coalition falls apart.

The Alliance will be on test almost as soon as parliament meets. The first item on the agenda is the election of a President and two Vice-Presidents. This presidency council, as the panel of three offices is called, has to be approved by a two-thirds majority. While a Kurdish coalition that won 26 per cent of the vote can provide the

necessary support, it is likely to set a high price. The Alliance might not mind conceding the Kurd demand for the post of President. However, its constituents have serious reservations about some of the other items on the Kurds' wish-list. These differences are likely to cause a series of confrontations as the new parliament takes up its main task of drafting a Constitution. Before the election, the Shias who believed that they were set to become predominant after being underdogs for centuries were unwilling to entertain Kurdish demands for autonomy. Now they will have to rethink, especially since the Constitution will not come into effect if the people in three provinces reject it in a referendum scheduled for October. SICRI and Dawa might have to tone down their Islamist agendas as they strike compromises with secular parties to stay in power. That will displease their cadres and the clerics who did much to ensure a strong turnout in the Shia belt.

Armed resistance to the occupation has abated in the Shia areas over the past few months while it rages in the Sunni belt. However, that circumstance does not necessarily indicate that the Shias are comfortable with the presence of foreign troops on their soil. The community's leadership is expected to ask the United States-led forces to withdraw as soon as it feels that the national security organs have been built up to full strength. While the U.S. maintains it will withdraw when this condition is met, the two sides might differ in their assessment of the readiness of the Iraqi forces. The alliance that forms the next government cannot meet the people's demand for public services without adequate security cover. A government protected by a foreign army will simply not be able to acquire legitimacy.

THE HINDU 15 FEB 2005

# Three Shias lead race for Iraq PM

## Former exile who misled US among them

Guardian News Service  
Baghdad, February 14

THREE RIVALS within the Shia-dominated coalition, which triumphed in Iraq's election, moved swiftly to bid for the job of Prime Minister on Sunday night.

Ibrahim al-Jaafari and Adel Abdul Mahdi are barely known outside the country and Ahmad Chalabi is more infamous than famous. Yet one of them is expected to become, overnight, a crucial player in West Asia.

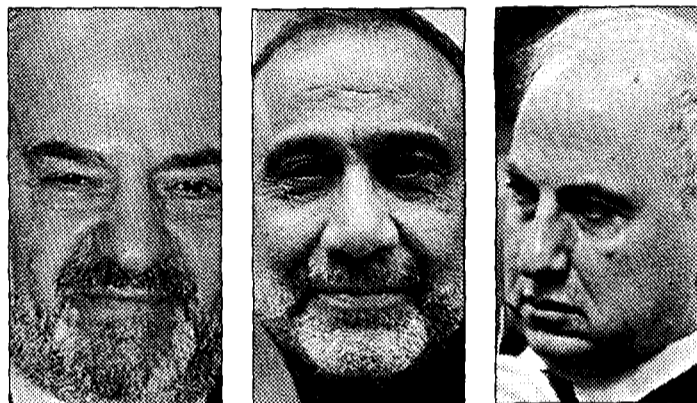
Sunday's announcement of the final tally from the January 30 election confirmed a sweeping victory for the United Iraqi Alliance, though its 47.6 per cent of votes cast was lower than some predictions.

It was enough, however, for leaders of the three main groupings in the coalition to advance their claim for the most powerful post in government.

Many analysts consider the favourite to be Mahdi, 63, an economist who served as finance minister in the outgoing interim government. The son of a guerrilla who fought the British in the 1920s, he joined the Ba'ath party in the 1960s when it espoused Arab nationalism and socialist economics but says he quit the movement in 1964 when members like Saddam moved up the ranks by killing opponents.

Mahdi fled to France, where he obtained degrees in politics and economics and dabbled in Maoism before moving to Iran and joining the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (Sciri), a group of exiles who campaigned for Saddam's overthrow and an Islamic-guided government in their homeland. Some analysts wonder whether the urbane Mahdi is a front man for hardliners within his party who want an Iran-style theocracy in Iraq guided by the country's leading Shia cleric.

Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani is credited as the architect of the Shia coalition who gathered rival parties under one banner. The 76-year-old cleric will retain influence regardless of who becomes Prime Minister.



Ibrahim al-Jaafari, Adel Abdul Mahdi and Ahmed Chalabi

### WHAT NEXT

- The poll results will be certified in three days if no complaints about the tally are upheld. A 275-member National Assembly will be formed, its composition determined by the share of the vote each list of candidates receives
- The Assembly will elect a presidency council consisting of president and two deputies. The council must have the backing of two-thirds of the Assembly
- The 3-person council will elect a Prime Minister and a Cabinet. The PM and Cabinet will seek approval from the National Assembly. They need only a simple majority, 138 votes. The government can

then start working

- The National Assembly will draw up a draft Constitution for Iraq by August 15, 2005. Once the Constitution is drafted, it must be presented to the Iraqi people for approval in a referendum no later than October 15, 2005
- If the Constitution is approved, a general election will be held by December 15, 2005, and the resulting government will take office before the end of the year. If the constitution is rejected by the electorate, the National Assembly will be dissolved and an election for a new Assembly will take place by December 15, 2005

Reuters

Mahdi's main rival is Jaafari, 57, a physician who polls suggest is Iraq's most popular politician after the grand ayatollah. Jaafari, who was exiled in Britain, is considered a moderate. "If asked to be PM, I would be willing to serve our nation," he said. He advocated an inclusive administration that would respect the Kurds' mandate and reach out to Sunnis who abstained *en masse* from the election, partly because of threats from insurgents such as Abu Musab al-Zarqawi: "It is a present to Zarqawi if we push them from the government."

The third candidate, Chalabi, is known internationally for heading a group of Iraqi exiles which fed Washington inaccurate reports of Saddam's weapons of mass destruction.

The failure to find any weapons contributed to a breach with the US administration and a raid on his house by American soldiers last year.

Falling out with the Americans, however, boosted his credibility with Iraqis fed up with the occupation, Chalabi's deputy, Mudhar Shawkat, said on Sunday. "It was to his benefit."



# Shias win most votes in Iraq

● Kurdish alliance in second place ● Allawi's party marginalised

By Atul Aneja

**MANAMA, FEB. 13.** A Shia-dominated coalition has won nearly half the votes cast in the January 30 election, raising the prospects of the formation of such a government for the first time in the history of Iraq.

Official results announced today said the alliance of Kurdish parties was in the second place, winning about 26 per cent of the 8.5 million votes cast. The party of the U.S.-backed interim Prime Minister, Iyad Allawi, was in the third place, polling only 13.8 per cent of the ballots.

Iraq's election commission said that it would receive complaints for a three-day period.

The results would become final if none of them was upheld.

The commission said that the turnout stood at around 58%, but much of the Sunni minority, which comprises the second largest community in Iraq, did not take part.

The United Iraqi Alliance (UIA) — a coalition of religious Shia candidates, backed by Iraq's top spiritual leader, Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani, won 48.1 per cent of the vote. It received more than four million votes, while the Kurdish alliance got more than two million votes. Mr. Allawi's Iraqiah party received a little over one million of the ballots.

Today's announcement con-

firmed the low turnout among the Sunnis. Only two per cent of eligible Iraqis in the Sunni Arab-dominated Anbar province voted, and only 29 per cent in the mainly Sunni Salahadin province. In the Nineveh province, which has many Sunni Arabs as well as Kurds, the turnout stood at 17 per cent.

## Kurdish parties' role

With the Iraqi elections held under the system of proportional representation, the UIA will receive nearly half of the seats in the 275-member transitional assembly. It could have a decisive influence in the new assembly, in case it managed to form an alliance with the Kurdish parties.

The Kurdish parties are expected to hold the balance of power in the assembly and have declared that they want the post of president, while the UIA is likely to nominate a Prime Minister.

There have been write-ups in the Iraqi press that Mr. Allawi was negotiating with the Kurdish parties in order to form a government. Such a possibility is now ruled out as a government can be formed only if a two-thirds majority in parliament is mustered.

## Negotiations ahead

Government formation could take several weeks in order to give time for negotiations that would result in a line-up that

was acceptable to all ethnic and religious groups.

The new assembly will pick a President and his two deputies who, in turn, will have to choose a Prime Minister. According to the interim constitution, the new National Assembly will write a permanent one by August 15. If the initial deadline will be submitted to a referendum on October 15. Elections for a new constitutionally elected government are slated for December 15.

## Ally of Teheran

AP, Reuters report from Baghdad: Abdul-Aziz al-Hakim, the tur-

banned pro-Iranian cleric heading the Shia ticket that won Iraq's national elections, is a long-time ally of Teheran's religious establishment and had led an anti-Saddam Hussein militia for two decades while in exile.

Aged in his 50s, al-Hakim was born in the city of Najaf and is the son of the late Grand Ayatollah Mohsen al-Hakim, one of the leading Shia clerics of the 20th century.

A student of Najaf's Hawza al-Ilmiyah, Shia Islam's centuries old seminary, al-Hakim also came under the tutelage of Grand Ayatollah Mohammed Baqer al-Sadr, leader of Iraq's first Shia political party, the Islamic Dawaa, who was killed by

Saddam's regime in 1980.

Influenced by both his father and al-Sadr, al-Hakim became an active opponent of Saddam, a secular Sunni who violently repressed opposition Shia activists in Iraq. Such retribution forced al-Hakim and his elder half-brother, Mohammad Baqer al-Hakim, to flee into Shia-run Iran in the early 1980s.

From there, Abdul-Aziz al-Hakim led the Iran-backed Badr Brigades, the military wing of Iraq's largest opposition Shia party, the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq, in a violent cross border struggle against Saddam's forces.

**U.S., U.K. hail verdict: Page 11**

# America can't stop Iran's N-ambitions: Rafsanjani

Reuters *HT 13*  
Tehran, February 11

WASHINGTON WILL not stop Iran pursuing nuclear technology and should not attempt a military "adventure" in the country, an influential cleric said on Friday. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice has exhorted Iran to give up what she says is a nuclear weapons programme.

US officials have stressed diplomacy but not ruled out an attack against atomic sites, which Iran insists are to meet booming demand for electricity.

"The Persian Gulf is not a region where they can have fireworks and Iran is not a country where they can come for an adventure," cleric and former President Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani told worshippers at Friday prayers. *هزاران نفر*

"It is not acceptable that developed countries generate 70 or 80 per cent of their electricity from nuclear energy and tell Iran, a great and powerful nation, that it cannot have nuclear electricity. Iran does not accept this," he added.

Although France produces close to 80 per cent of its electricity from nuclear power stations, most major industrialised nations derive under 30 percent, US Energy Information Administration data says.

Analysts often hail Rafsanjani as a pragmatist who wants to restore diplomatic relations with the United States.

THE HOUSTON TIMES 12 FEB 2005

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# Blair hopeful of NATO deal on Iraq

By Hasan Suroor

LONDON, FEB. 10. The British Prime Minister, Tony Blair, has indicated that the divisions among NATO countries over the invasion of Iraq would not come in the way of reaching an agreement on training Iraqi security forces, paving the way for an eventual withdrawal of foreign troops. He told a committee of senior MPs recently that he expected even those NATO members which were not involved in the "conflict or its aftermath", to come on board.

Though he did not name the countries, he was seen to be referring to Germany and France who opposed the British-U.S. invasion, calling it illegal. Mr. Blair, who was giving

evidence before the Commons' powerful liaison committee, comprising Chairmen of the House select committees, said: "I think you may find, at the NATO meeting at the end of February, we get agreement on help for training Iraqi security forces. I hope that will see some of the countries that haven't been involved either in the conflict or its aftermath involved in that."

### No time-table

Mr. Blair refused to lay down a time-table for withdrawal of British troops but hinted that details of an exit strategy might emerge after a new government took over in Iraq.

The key, according to him, was the pace of "Iraqi-isation"

of security forces. "Over the next few weeks, as the picture emerges more clearly and we get a new Iraqi Government come into being, I hope we can then set out for people exactly what we then think is the way forward for the Iraqi-isation of security," he said.

Mr. Blair dismissed the criticism that there had not been proper planning for the post-invasion phase, and said that the task was always going to be difficult.

His remarks came as an opinion poll showed that despite widespread opposition to his Iraq policy, it is unlikely to have a significant impact on the electoral fortunes of the Labour Party in the coming general election.

# No Iran attack plans: Rice

*N. K. 3 5/11*  
**London, Feb. 4 (Reuters):** Secretary of state Condoleezza Rice began her first foreign tour as America's top diplomat with a double-edged pledge today that Washington had no immediate plans to attack Iran.

"The question is simply not on the agenda at this point — we have diplomatic means to do this," she said when asked if Washington was considering military action to force compliance from Tehran on its nuclear programme.

Her response, assuaging fears of imminent military action, though leaving the door open for the future, was unlikely to reduce global tensions over Iran, which President George W. Bush this week called the "world's primary state sponsor of terror."

Rice hopes to use her week-long tour of Europe and West Asia to heal transatlantic ties after the war in Iraq and launch a new push for West Asia peace.

Rice insisted the West Asia conflict was high on the US agenda, as both Europe and the Arab world want. She reit-

erated US offers to help train Palestinian security forces and hailed a shift in mood under new Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas.

"The political atmosphere has changed concerning terrorism," she said. "The fact is though, that there will have to be action, to make certain that terrorists cannot frustrate both his plans and endanger the lives of Israelis"

Three EU countries are

trying to engage and negotiate with Iran to stop it developing nuclear weapons, but the US has preferred a tactic of confronting and isolating it.

Rice said Iran, branded by Washington as part of an "axis of evil" with pre-war Iraq and North Korea, needs to live up to its obligations and agree to inspections.

"It is the Iranians that are isolated on this issue — not the US," she said, lambasting the

Islamic republic's "abysmal human rights record."

Reform was sweeping through West Asia, she said in a speech littered with references to the US push for "liberty". "Iran is not immune to the changes that are going on in this region," she added, referring to recent elections in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Iran denies US charges it is developing a nuclear bomb. It says its programmes are for peaceful power generation needed to accommodate its growing population.

Despite indicating that Washington would not accede to Europe's plea for it to join the talks, Rice played down the different approaches. "There is really very little difference between us about the challenges we face in dealing with the Iranian regime. We have many diplomatic tools still at our disposal and we intend to pursue them fully," she added.

British foreign secretary Jack Straw glossed over policy differences to marvel at Rice's "formidable programme of diplomacy" on her first trip as secretary of state.



Condoleezza Rice in London. (AFP)

## Pocket atlases for press

**London, Feb. 4 (Reuters):** With Americans suffering a reputation as geographically challenged, Condoleezza Rice handed out pocket atlases to the US press corps on her first trip abroad as secretary of state.

"I would not want anybody to feel lost" the former university provost quipped as she handed out 18 copies of the books on her plane. Americans are often mocked abroad for their perceived lack of knowledge of the outside world — surveys sometimes show US kids cannot even locate neighbours Canada and Mexico. The souvenir for journalists of her inaugural eight-day, 10-stop trip to Europe and West Asia was also Rice's way of showing she will travel widely to fulfil her pledge that "the time for diplomacy is now."

Asked by reporters whether the presents were a portent of heavy travel schedules for the new top US diplomat, Rice smiled and replied: "You will see."

# The reopened Iraq debate

By Hamid Ansari

**I**RAQ IS back in the headlines, loaded with euphoria. The electoral exercise has been undertaken; the results have yet to be announced. The running commentary on CNN on January 30 tended to suggest a near perfect exercise. No mention of course was made of the invasion, the occupation, the Iraqi dead, the reduction of Iraq to a stone-age condition, the falsehood of the pretext for war and the failure to find traces of weapons of mass destruction.

Many beyond the shores of the United States have joined the chorus. Talk of vigorous diplomacy and of "short-term alliance with the U.S." on Iraq policy is again being advocated with a view to counter "religious fundamentalist forces." Henry Kissinger's thesis, that a U.S. failure in Iraq would cause problems for India with its large Muslim population, is being advocated. Once again, as at the time of the debate on sending Indian troops to join the 'Coalition of the Willing', national interest is cited as the supreme determinant. In the process "coercive democratisation" is endorsed, forgetful of the lessons of history, forgetful of the fact that Rousseau's theory of the General Will taking precedence over the Will of All became the basis of all forms of European dictatorships.

Facts are pertinent to the argument. The U.S. had brushed aside talk of a withdrawal timetable. Contracts have been awarded for building 12 new bases in Iraq. Iraq's

Interior Minister has suggested that a withdrawal may be possible after 18 months. The training of a new Iraqi security force is well behind schedule; it is anyway intended to undertake internal policing rather than guard the country's borders. No plans seem to exist to provide armour, air force and other ingredients of a modern army to Iraq. Would a new Iraq then be as un-militarised as

of the public. India can and should take serious and continuous interest in these developments. A federal arrangement in Iraq would not impinge on our interests; a break-up of Iraq — *de facto or de jure* would. The new Iraq's relations with its neighbours would determine the security environment in the region and would be of paramount interest to us. So would Iraqi views on the 1975 Treaty with Iran and on the Security Council determined borders with Kuwait. If Iraq's immediate neighbours convene a meeting to guarantee its territorial integrity and friendly relations — with or without outside the participation of extra-regional powers, we should be fully supportive of it. We should reiterate — as we have already done — our commitment to cooperate with Iraq in its reconstruction in every possible way.

Vigorous diplomacy is desirable; it has however to be realistic and based on capacity and capability. Cooperation with the United States is desirable but does it need to extend to its ideological predilections? The doctrines of pre-emption, regime change, coercive democratisation, cartographic engineering, and "Islamic threat" do not respond to Indian needs or Indian thinking. India should steer clear of them. West Asia does have problems but correct diagnosis should take precedence over treatment.

(M. H. Ansari is a Distinguished Fellow at the Observer Research Foundation, New Delhi.)

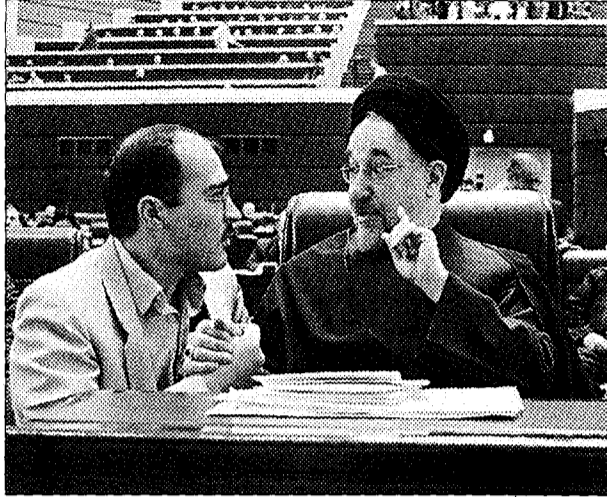
## Does cooperation with the United States need to extend to its ideological predilections?

Over large mixed cities, be any easier to resolve.

The National Assembly would confront other challenges. It has to elect the Presidency Council of three members that in turn would select a new Prime Minister. The latter exercise may be difficult since Ahmad Chalabi is reported to be at the head of the list of candidates of the Alliance supported by Ayatollah Sistani. Where would this leave Iyad Allawi?

The preoccupations of the post-election Iraq would be with matters domestic with a focus on internal security, provision of essential services, constitution-making and power sharing. There is little that outside powers — other than America — can do in relation to these. Peace will presumably return to Iraq when levels of resentment begin to level off and when the government of the day begins to address the real concerns

On another front an informal referendum in Kurdish areas, on election day itself, suggested an 11 to 1 opinion in favour of an independent Kurdish state that, in a practical sense, already exists. As a result, the constitution-making exercise cannot



Iranian President Mohammad Khatami (right) talks with a lawmaker at the parliament in Tehran on Wednesday.

AP

## Iran for cordial ties with US

Barbara Slavin  
*Washington, February 2*

IRAN'S TOP national security official said on Tuesday that his government wants better relations with the United States, but he advised the Bush administration to stop threatening Iran and said his country will not yield to demands that it permanently stop its effort to enrich uranium — which the White House says is intended to make a nuclear bomb.

In a rare interview, Hassan Rowhani, Iran's equivalent of national security adviser and the nation's chief negotiator on the nuclear issue, repeated Iran's assertion that its nuclear program is only for the production of energy. Iran agreed in November to suspend efforts to enrich uranium, but Rowhani said the suspension could last only for "some months, not years," while Iran talks with Britain, Germany and France about concessions on trade and other matters.

Rowhani, a senior member of the Shi'ite Muslim clerical establishment that has ruled Iran since a revolution overthrew the US-backed Shah in 1979, said Iran "would like to have a suitable atmosphere for both sides to move to a better place" after so many years of estrangement. "If

the US is after solving the (nuclear) problem, definitely there would be a way (to improve relations), but we don't think they are looking for a right solution," he said. "They usually use threats, and threats cannot be a basis for dialogue."

Vice-President Cheney said recently that Iran's nuclear program puts it "right at the top of the list" of potential trouble spots for the United States. Condoleezza Rice, in Senate hearings before becoming secretary of state, dubbed Iran as an "outpost of tyranny."

In 2002, President Bush labelled Iran a member of an "axis of evil" and has not ruled out the use of force to overturn Iran's theocratic regime. Rowhani said neither Iran nor the United States was interested in direct talks over the nuclear issue now but that the United States was consulting with the Europeans and was well aware of the status of negotiations.

He said the best way to guarantee that Iran would not build bombs was if it could develop "a close and comprehensive relationship" with the West. "The tone of their remarks has been unsuitable," he said. "The US does not have the means or the power" to change the Iranian regime.

USA Today

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES 03 FEB 2005

# Sunni thumbs down for polls

Associated Press  
Baghdad, February 2

IRAQ'S LEADING Sunni Muslim clerics said on Wednesday that the landmark elections lack legitimacy because large numbers of Sunnis did not participate in the balloting — which the clerics had asked them to boycott.

Emboldened by the elections, which US and Iraqi authorities cited as a victory for democracy, the police chief in Mosul demanded the insurgents hand over weapons within two weeks or he would “wipe out” anyone giving them shelter. Large numbers of majority Shi'ite Muslims and Kurds took part in Sunday's election for a new National Assembly and regional parliaments. Although no results or turnout figures have been released, US officials say turnout appeared much lower in Sunni areas where the insurgent is strongest.

In its first statement since the balloting, the Association of Muslim Scholars said the balloting lacked legitimacy because of low Sunni participation. The Association called months ago on Sunnis to shun the polls because of the presence of US and other foreign troops.

Iraqi officials acknowledge voting problems, including a ballot shortage in Baghdad, Basra and Mosul which have substantial Sunni populations. With many Sunnis having stayed away, a ticket endorsed by the Shi'ite clergy is expected to gain the biggest number of seats in the 275-member National Assembly, followed by Kurds and a list headed by interim Prime Minister Ayad Allawi, a secular Shi'ite.

In its statement, the Association said the election “lacks legitimacy because a large portion of these people who represent many spectra have boycotted it.” As a result, the Association said the new leadership lacked a mandate to draft a new constitution and should be considered a temporary administration.

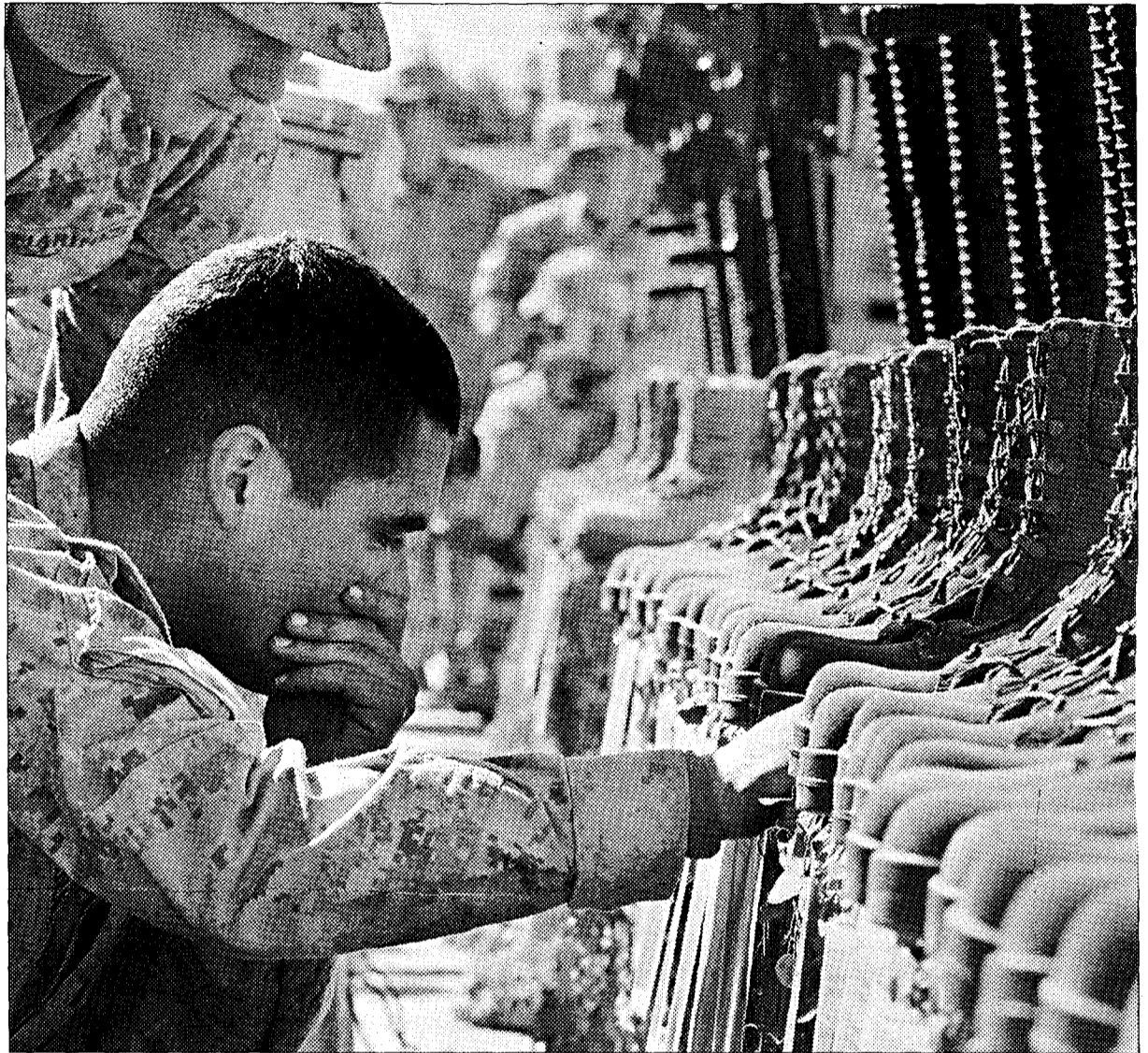
“We make it clear to the United Nations and the international community that they should not get involved in granting this election legitimacy because such a move will open the gates of evil,” the statement said. “We are going to respect the choice of those who voted and we will consider the new government — if all the parties participating in the political process agree on it — as a transitional government with limited powers.”

In Mosul, police Gen. Mohammed Ahmed al-Jubouri offered amnesty to insurgents who handed over their weapons within two weeks, but promised tough action if they did not. In an interview with the provincial television station, al-Jubouri threatened “to wipe out any village that would hide weapons after the two-week period and shell any safe haven for the insurgents.”

Mosul, Iraq's third largest city, has been tense since insurgents rose up in November in support of rebels under siege in Fallujah west of Baghdad. The entire 5,000 member police force deserted before US and Iraqi troops regained control.

Meanwhile, a Shi'ite cleric who ran in local council elections in the holy city of Najaf, escaped an assassination attempt Wednesday, Najaf police chief Ghalib al-Jazaeri said. The cleric, Khalid al-Numani, is a member of the Supreme Council of the Islamic Revolution in Iraq, one of the major Shi'ite parties that participated in Sunday's balloting. Police had no other details on the attack.

Insurgents blew up an oil pipeline on Wednesday near the central city of Samarra, police said. An Iraqi motorist was shot dead on the main desert highway west of Baghdad. A witness claimed US troops opened fire when vehicle when it tried to overtake an American military convoy. US vehicles have often been targeted by car bombers who ram convoys.



A US soldier during a memorial service for 31 Marines, who died in a copter crash last week, in Rautbah on Wednesday.

AP

## Baghdad wants sanctions lifted

Associated Press  
UNHQ, February 2

IRAQ WANTS the United Nations to lift all sanctions and stop using the country's oil revenue to pay compensation to victims of the 1991 Gulf War and the salaries of UN weapons inspectors, Iraq's UN ambassador said.

Samir Sumaidaie called sanctions “anachronistic and inappropriate” and said it's time for the Security Council to recognise that Iraq is a

“much more internationally friendly” country that wants to be at peace with its neighbours.

No longer needed, he said, was the UN Monitoring, Verification and Inspection Commission, which was responsible for dismantling Iraqi programs to build chemical or biological weapons or long-range missiles. The commission's inspectors left Iraq just before the 2003 war that toppled Saddam Hussein, and the United States has barred them from returning.

The commission, known as UNMOVIC, is funded by proceeds from the sale of Iraqi oil, at a cost of more than \$10 million a year.

“I think it's generally acknowledged that Iraq now does not pose such a threat, and does not in its present form have any weapons of mass destruction. And, therefore, to continue to fund a bureaucracy to do what, to just continue to say every day that there is a threat, is a waste of money.”

03 FEB 2005

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

# Elections to what

## Does Iraq make it to democracy?

It cannot be said that elections just held in Iraq were fair, or whether they will change things on the ground and bring stability to the country after destroying the same stability with impunity and with a lot of illegal manoeuvres. Fear of being kidnapped prevented international observers from doing their job and providing an objective picture of voter turnout or whether the elections were manipulated. Official estimates of voter turnout were placed at 72 per cent, then revised downward to 60 per cent, which does not make it any more credible. No reliable information is available and even if it was 60 per cent who voted, it does not look as if Iraq's Sunnis have voted in numbers, which leaves the new government without much legitimacy. BBC, which presented a more accurate picture of the elections, showed pictures from the air of row upon row of roads, empty of vehicles and which are normally choked with vehicles, simply because the Americans prohibited them for fear of suicide attacks.

There is also the issue of how much sovereignty the elected government will be allowed. If, for instance, the new government should request American and British troops to leave the country (nearly, two hundred thousand of them), will the demand be complied with? If they don't, it will strike a fatal blow to the prestige and legitimacy of the new government. If there are doubts about the integrity of the election commission; or if Sunnis are excluded; or the government has very limited powers and policy continues to be dictated by Washington, the insurgency will continue as before. The elections, which could be held only because of draconian security measures such as a ban on movement of all private cars, would just be an irrelevant, if diverting, interlude.

According to a report issued by Human Rights Watch, a New York-based organization, arbitrary detentions continue in the new Iraq, and torture is routine. Not much has changed in this respect from Saddam Hussein's era; never mind the meaningless excitement on Bush's part from far off Washington. Police continue to extort bribes from prisoners for their release. If torture continues as before, there is not much that can be said for Iraq's version of democracy, except to note that the secular ideas of the Saddam era, have given way to Shias and Sunnis, and far greater security all round though to little purpose, gives nothing to Bush and his civilising influence. Saddam ensured a decent living standard which Bush is unable to reach at all.

Americans have rather a relaxed standard of democracy for their friends: look at Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Pakistan. If torture is routine, corruption of the electoral mandate follows and should be accepted Bush seems to say; whether by manipulating the result itself, or by denying powers to the new administration. In short, we are quite unable to presume that a new and democratic era is dawning in Iraq; reports of all American news agencies notwithstanding. The French, the Germans and the Russians have welcomed the elections; this is only to be expected as the French have called for holding of elections earlier. This tactical ploy will enable the world community to hold the Americans to account when, and if, the results of the elections are subverted.



## VOTING DIVIDES

It is too early to determine how much the elections in Iraq will help to create the conditions for peace and stability in the country. Although the voter turnout has been impressive, there are numerous factors that may still continue to destabilize Iraq. The result of the elections held in Iraq will not be known for nearly ten more days, but the main trends are obvious. There can be no doubt that the first really democratic elections in Iraq in recent times have invited widespread enthusiasm. Nearly eight million voters, out of thirteen million registered voters, exercised their franchise despite continued violence and insurgency. Although there may be continued controversy over the precise figures, it is clear that by even conservative estimates a majority of the electorate voted. Similarly, there is good evidence that voter participation was strong in regions dominated by Shias and Kurds, a majority of Sunni voters apparently did not participate as enthusiastically in the polls. The Shias, of course, in a majority in the country, viewed this as an opportunity to win power, finally, through the United Iraqi Alliance. Not surprisingly, they responded enthusiastically to the call of their spiritual leader, Ayatollah Ali Sistani, to show up in large numbers at the polling stations.

However, precisely for this reason, Sunni alienation is likely to accentuate as Shias try to establish their dominance in the post-election phase. Unfortunately, therefore, the Shia-Sunni sectarian divide may continue to push the country to a civil war. Moreover, there were reports that some officials were campaigning for the interim prime minister, Mr Ayad Allawi, and the candidates of his alliance. This has further angered the Sunnis, who form the vanguard of the insurgency and the resistance movement. The most important reason for the erosion of the legitimacy of the election is the huge American security presence in the country. A large section of those who voted and stood as candidates are also opposed to the so-called American "occupation" of their country. The danger, of course, is that if the American forces were to leave Iraq, even greater anarchy may be generated in the country. Finally, it remains to be seen if the democratic forces are able to provide good governance to the country. It would be a real tragedy if the citizens of Iraq were to lose faith in democracy as a result of the elections.

THE TELEGRAPH

02 FEB 2005

## সন্ধিক্ষণে ইরাক

অষ্টাদশশতাব্দী পরে ইরাকে আবার বহুদলীয় নির্বাচন অনুষ্ঠিত হইল। ১৯৫৪ সালের পর জনপ্রতিনিধিদের এ ভাবে নির্বাচিত করার সুযোগ ইরাকিরা আর পান নাই, তাহার পরেই সামরিক অভ্যুত্থানে রাজাকে হত্যা করিয়া বাথ পার্টি সেখানে নিরঙ্কুশ ক্ষমতা দখল করে। আর বাথ পার্টির সর্বময় কর্তৃত্ব সাদ্দাম হুসেনের হাতে কেন্দ্রীভূত হইবার পর গণতন্ত্রের যাবতীয় সম্ভাবনাই বিনষ্ট হয়। এ বার যে পরিস্থিতিতে নির্বাচন অনুষ্ঠিত হইয়াছে, জঙ্গিদের হিংসা, রক্তপাত ও অস্থিচূর্ণতার মাত্রা যে ভাবে নির্বাচন আসন্ন হইবার সঙ্গে-সঙ্গে বাড়িয়াছে, তাহাতে গণতান্ত্রিক প্রক্রিয়ার সাফল্য লইয়া যথেষ্ট সংশয় জাগ্রত হইয়াছিল। জঙ্গিরা বয়কটের ডাক দিয়াছিল, এমনকী মার্কিন বাহিনীর উপস্থিতি ও তত্ত্বাবধানে অনুষ্ঠিত ভোট-প্রক্রিয়ায় যোগদান করাকে ইসলাম-বিরোধী আখ্যা দিয়া তাহার বিরুদ্ধাচরণকে বৈধ ও ন্যায়পরায়ণ ধর্মযুদ্ধের সঙ্গেও একাত্ম করিয়া জেহাদিরা প্রচার চালাইয়াছিল। কিন্তু অন্তত ষাট শতাংশ ভোটারের সক্রিয় অংশগ্রহণ দেখাইয়া দিয়াছে, সংখ্যাগরিষ্ঠ ইরাকি জনগণ সাদ্দাম হুসেনের স্বৈরাচারের বিকল্প হিসাবে গণতন্ত্রের জন্য উন্মুখ। ভোটারদের তরফে এই সাদ্দাম মার্কিন প্রেসিডেন্টকে উল্লসিত করিয়াছে। তিনি এই ঘটনার মধ্যে তাহার বহু নিশ্চিত ইরাক নীতির অনুমোদন খুঁজিয়া পাইয়াছেন।

এমন নয় যে জঙ্গিরা ভোটারদের সম্মত করিয়া নির্বাচন বানচাল করার চেষ্টা করে নাই। ইতস্তত হিংসায় অন্তত ৪৪ জনের প্রাণ গিয়াছে। কিন্তু ভোটাররা যে সম্মত উপেক্ষা করিয়া লাখে-লাখে বুথে লাইন দিয়াছেন, ইহাও সত্য। কিছু কাল আগেই অনুষ্ঠিত আফগানিস্তানেও প্রেসিডেন্ট নির্বাচনে এমন অভূতপূর্ব সাদ্দাম মেলে নাই। ইরাকের মতো সেখানেও বৃশ প্রশাসন ব্যবস্থা-বদল ঘটাইয়া পশ্চিমী গণতন্ত্রের পরীক্ষানিরীক্ষা করিতে উদ্যোগী হইয়াছিল। কিন্তু পশ্চিম এশিয়ার মধ্যমণি ইরাকে সেই পরীক্ষার সাফল্য অন্য মাত্রা পাইতেছে। প্রাথমিক রিপোর্ট অনুসারে, উৎসাহী ভোটারদের আধিকাংশই ছিলেন শিয়া ও কুর্দ, সুন্নিরা পারতপক্ষে ভোটকেন্দ্রে যান নাই। জনসংখ্যার ষাট শতাংশ শিয়া ও কুর্দ শতাংশ কুর্দ জনজাতি সাদ্দাম হুসেন ও তাহার সুন্নিপ্রধান বাথ পার্টির এন্থিপাতের বিপরীতে এই প্রথম নিজ প্রতিনিধিদের শাসক মনোনীত করার সুযোগ পাইয়াছিলেন। ইরাক যে সুদীর্ঘ কাল তাহার গরিষ্ঠ শিয়া জনগোষ্ঠীর প্রতিনিধিদের দ্বারা শাসিত হইতে চিনিত হইয়াছে, ইহাতে সন্দেহ নাই। এই সম্ভাবনা পশ্চিম এশিয়ার অন্য সুন্নি-ধর্মী রাষ্ট্রগুলির শাসকদের কিছুটা উৎকণ্ঠায় ফেলিয়াছে। তাহাদের শঙ্কা, ইহার ফলে শিয়া শাসিত ইরান লাভবান হইবে। ইরাকের শিয়ারা বহু ব্যাপারেই প্রতিবেশী ইরানের আয়াতুল্লাহদের ইরানীয় পৃষ্ঠপোষকতার দিকে তাকাইয়া থাকেন। সাদ্দামবর্জিত আশ্রয়লাভের জাতি গঠনে মার্কিন বিদেশ দফতরের চেয়েও ইরানের ইরানীয় নেতৃত্বের অবদানই অধিক, এ ধারণা পশ্চিম এশিয়ার অনেক শিলামি তান্ত্রিকেরই। সাদ্দাম-যুগে ভুলিয়া ইরান-ইরাকের শিয়া ইহুতি সিরিয়া ও লেবাননকেও এক অক্ষে আনিয়া ফেলিতে পারে, সংস্থা পশ্চিম এশিয়ার জন্য রচিত মার্কিন পথ-চিত্রের পরিপন্থী।

যাঃ এ সবই অবশ্য অনাগত ভবিষ্যতের সম্ভাবনার কথা। ঘটমান মান হইল প্রতিনিধিত্বমূলক গণতন্ত্রের পথে যুদ্ধবিধ্বস্ত ইরাকের বর্তমান পদবিক্ষেপ। এত কাল শাসন ক্ষমতায় থাকা সুন্নি জনগোষ্ঠী দুর্ভাগ্যবশত সাদ্দাম হুসেনকে প্রতিরোধের প্রতীক বানাইয়া নূতন শাসকদের বিরুদ্ধে লড়াইয়ের তীব্রতা বাড়াইয়া তুলিতে পারে। শিয়ারা গৃহযুদ্ধের আশঙ্কা উড়াইয়া দেওয়া যায় না। দখলদার মার্কিন বাহিনীর উপস্থিতি এবং নিয়ন্ত্রণ সর্বদাই 'জাতীয় মুক্তি'র জন্য বাগাম ও প্রতিরোধের আহ্বানকে আকর্ষণীয় রাখিবে। বিদেশি সৈন্যদারদের উপর নির্বাচিত শাসকদের নির্ভরতা সেই দুরোধকে নৈতিক বৈধতাও দিবে। শাসকদের ভুলভ্রান্তি ও প্রাণবদ্ধতা তাহাতে ইন্ধন জোগাইবে। ইরাকে শান্তি ও সুস্থিতির সম্ভাবনা তাই এখনও সুদূর। তাহা সম্ভব হইতে পারে কেবল সুদর্শি বাহিনীর ঘরে ফেরার পর। তেমন কোনও আশু প্রকল্প যে বিজর্জ বৃশ তাহা জানাইয়াও দিয়াছেন। সাদ্দামের আমলের সেনা নিরাপত্তা বাহিনী ভাঙিয়া দেওয়ায় নূতন সরকারকে জঙ্গি ও স্বেচ্ছা হইতে সামরিক নিরাপত্তা দেওয়ার দায়ও বৃশ প্রশাসনকেই আত্মকর্ত হইতে হইবে। এখনই ইঙ্গ-মার্কিন বাহিনীর প্রত্যাবর্তন নির্বাচিত শাসকদের পতন ঘনাইয়া তুলিতে পারে। ইরাক এক সন্ধিক্ষণে।

01 FEB 2005

# Iraq PM calls for unity talks after historic vote

LUKE BAKER  
BAGHDAD, JANUARY 31

**I**RAQ's interim Prime Minister vowed on Monday to unite the country's competing ethnic and religious groups, trying to build broad support a day after millions of voters cast ballots in a historic election.

Attempting to seize momentum from Sunday's unexpectedly successful poll, Iyad Allawi said in a televised address: "Starting from today, I will begin a new national dialogue to ensure all Iraqis have a voice in the new government."

Electoral officials estimate around eight million Iraqis turned out to vote, confounding predictions many would be scared away by insurgent threats of a bloodbath. But although the election day onslaught of suicide bombers and mortars was less bloody than expected, experts warned the in-

surgency was far from over and militants would strike back.

"The whole world is watching us. As we worked together yesterday to finish dictatorship, let us work together towards a bright future — Sunnis and Shias, Muslims and Christians, Arabs, Kurds and Turkmen," Allawi declared, speaking at a conference centre once used by Saddam Hussein and his officials.

Although Iraqis queued up enthusiastically to cast their ballots in many places, numbers appeared to be low in Sunni Arab areas where the insurgency is strongest — highlighting the dangerous communal rifts facing a new government.

"It is time to put the divisions of the past behind us and work together to show the world the power and potential of this great country," said Allawi, a secular

the United Iraqi Alliance list.

"I doubt very much Iraq will witness a civil war in the short or long run. We reassure our brothers that any step Iraq takes must include all parts of Iraq...No one can be left out."

Across much of Iraq there was a sense of accomplishment after the vote, with many people displaying index fingers stained with purple polling ink, proud to have braved insurgent threats against the first multi-party poll in 50 years.

Militants tried to make good on their threat to drench the poll in blood, killing 35 people in suicide bomb and mortar attacks, but the death toll was far below what some had feared.

Interior Minister Falah al-Naqib attributed the relative calm to a three-day security blitz, in which he said more than 200 sus-

pected insurgents had been detained countrywide.

Praise for the vote poured in from around the world.

Paul Bremer, the US governor of Iraq until June last year, praised it as a victory for democracy and said it had proved the sceptics wrong. But he warned insurgents would strike again.

Experts also cautioned that true success would depend on whether Sunnis accept the outcome and join the new government. While in some Sunni Arab areas many queued through the day to vote, in other towns, notably Baiji, Ramadi and Samarra, almost no voters pitched up. On the other hand, in the Shia South and Kurdish North, turnout was very strong. Electoral officials said turnout was better than expected in two Sunni provinces, but gave no figures.

—Reuters

**I will begin a new national dialogue to ensure all Iraqis have a voice in the new government**

—Iyad Allawi



ready claimed a degree of victory. Shia leaders were quick to issue assurances they plan to bring the Sunni minority, dominant under Saddam, into the political process.

"We are looking at ways of including Sunnis," said Ibrahim Bahr al-Ulourm, a candidate on

Shia who has a chance of being re-named Prime Minister in the next government.

Shias, who make up about 60 per cent of Iraq's population, are widely expected to have won most votes in the election, and officials in the top Shia-led coalition, the United Iraqi Alliance, have al-

# 36 killed in Iraqi poll violence

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to Arin ①

By Atul Aneja

**MANAMA, JAN. 30.** Amid violence that claimed at least 36 lives, the turnout in Iraq's controversial elections has been uneven with few people turning out to vote in the Sunni-dominated areas. Larger numbers made an appearance at polling stations in the northern and southern parts of the country.

Nine suicide bombers unleashed a wave of attacks targeting polling stations in the eastern, western and central parts of Baghdad, killing at least 12 persons. A mortar attack in the Shia-dominated Sadr city killed four persons while four more died in and around the capital. Explosions were also reported from the northern Iraqi city of Mosul, which has a mixed population of Sunni Arabs and Kurds. A British C-130 Hercules transport plane crashed northwest of the capital but there was no word on casualties.

Despite the higher turnout, a bomb went off outside a school which served as a polling station in the Shia stronghold of Basra in southern Iraq. The group led by the Jordanian militant, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, claimed in an Internet statement that 13 of its suicide bombers had carried out a string of attacks against election centres in Iraq and launched 30 rockets inside Baghdad's high security Green Zone.

## 72 per cent turnout

Later in the evening, Iraq's electoral commission told a news conference 90 minutes before polls closed that the turnout was estimated at 72 per cent with 90 per cent or more in some Shia areas. However, the top U.N. electoral adviser, Carlos Valenzuela, offered a more restrained assessment, saying the turnout appeared to be high in many areas but that it was too early to make a definite prediction.

Prior to the elections, Carina Perelli, who heads the U.N. electoral assistance division,

had accused American troops of interfering in the polls. "The U.S. military has been extremely overenthusiastic in trying to help out with these elections," she said. "We have been basically saying that they should try to minimise their involvement as this is an Iraqi process." The series of attacks took place despite the heavy presence of around 300,000 Iraqi and American troops that have been deployed around polling stations.

## Streets deserted

Iraqi militant organisations, including Mr. Zarqawi's group had warned people to stay indoors or face deadly attacks, while major Sunni political groups had issued a poll boycott call. Streets in the central Sunni cities of Fallujah, Samarra and Ramadi were deserted and few polling stations were open. In Tikrit, the hometown of the former Iraqi President, Saddam Hussein, only seven persons showed up in the first two hours of voting, the Associated Press reported.

Mosul was also desolate, despite American troops and Iraqi soldiers using loudspeakers to announce the locations of polling sites and exhorting people to vote. The province's deputy escaped an assassination attempt but his bodyguard was killed. A gun battle between resistance fighters and American troops also broke out in the western part of the city. West of Mosul, in the town of Tal Afar, at least eight persons were wounded in clashes between guerillas and security forces.

An opinion poll conducted by the U.S.-based Zogby International predicted that only nine per cent of Sunnis were expected to participate in today's election. As expected, polling was significant in the Shia cities of Basra, Najaf and Karbala, where the United Iraqi Alliance, which has the "blessings" of the top Shia spiritual leader, Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani, is expected to do well.

More reports on Page 14

THE HINDU

31 JAN 2005

# Baghdad braves bombs & bloomer

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**Baghdad, Jan. 30: Thirty-five bodies on the ground, 13 suicide bombers at work and a turnout of 72 per cent — or is it 60 per cent?**

Iraq's poll guardians backtracked this evening on turnout estimates, but millions of Iraqis stayed the course to take part in the country's first multi-party election in half a century.

Baghdad's streets were closed to traffic, but full of children playing soccer and men and women walking, some carrying babies. The voters dropped ballots into boxes even as continuous mortar shells started exploding at about noon.

Militants struck mainly in Baghdad, launching nine suicide blasts in rapid succession. The Iraqi wing of al Qaida claimed responsibility.

If the insurgents wanted to stop people from voting in Baghdad, they failed. The voters were defiant, and there was a feeling that the people of Baghdad had turned a corner.

## BALLOT & BULLET

### • Who is being elected?

275 members of a national assembly, which will pick a new government

### • Who are the voters?

Iraqis over the age of 18 on January 1

### • Who did they vote for?

There is one national ballot, without constituencies. Voters cast one vote for a party's list of candidates

### • How are the winners chosen?

Through proportional representation. So a list that wins 20% votes will get 55 seats. They will go to the top 55 names on the list

### • And the result?

Preliminary results in six to seven days and final tally in about 10 days

No one was claiming the insurgency was over or the deadly attacks would end. But the atmosphere in this usually grim capital, a city at war and an ethnic microcosm of the country, had changed, with people dressed in their best clothes to go to vote in what was generally a convivial mood.

Samir Hassan, 32, who lost his leg in a car bomb blast last

year, said as he waited to vote in Baghdad: "I would have crawled here if I had to. I don't want terrorists to kill other Iraqis like they tried to kill me."

But in parts of the Sunni Arab heartland, where the insurgency has been bloodiest and many boycotted the election, poll stations were empty.

If a jarring note rang out louder than the bombs, it was



struck by officials. The election commission withdrew its initial turnout count, saying a previous figure of 72 per cent was based on "very rough, word-of-mouth estimates gathered informally".

Commission spokesman Farid Ayar said up to eight million Iraqis may have voted, which would be a little over 60 per cent of registered voters. If the revised estimate stays unchanged, that will still be more than many had expected. The government had set a target of at least 50 per cent.

With international monitors mostly staying away for fear of kidnapping, it was impossible to assess the fairness of the poll or accuracy of the turnout estimates.

Hailing the election as a "resounding success", President George W. Bush said: "The world is hearing the voice of freedom from the centre of the Middle East." (See Page 4)

WRITTEN WITH AGENCY REPORTS

# Iraq keeps date with democracy

## Suicide bombings leave 44 dead

5/16/11



Mr Allawi casts his vote. — AFP

### Associated Press

BAGHDAD, Jan. 30. — Iraqis defied violence and calls for election boycott to vote in the country's first free election in half a century today even as insurgents seeking to wreck the vote struck polling stations with a string of suicide bombings and mortar volleys, killing at least 44 people, including many attackers.

A website statement, purportedly from Abu Musab al-Zarqawi's group, allied with Al-Qaida, claimed responsibility for today's attacks.

Mr George W Bush said today: 'The world is hearing the voice of freedom from the centre of the Middle East.' Praising Iraqis for rejecting 'the anti-democratic ideology of the errorists,' the US President said: 'They (Iraqis) have refused to be intimidated by thugs.'

Women in black *abayas* whispered prayers at the sound of a nearby explosion as they waited to cast their ballot at a Baghdad polling station. But the

mood for many was upbeat. Civilians and policemen danced with joy at one of the five polling stations where photographers were allowed and some streets were packed with voters walking shoulder-to-shoulder to vote. The elderly made their way, hobbling on canes or riding wheelchairs; one elderly woman was pushed along on a wooden cart, another man carried a disabled 80-year-old on his back. 'This is democracy,' said a young woman voter, holding up a thumb stained with purple ink to prove she had voted.

Officials said the turnout among the 14 million eligible voters appeared higher than the 57 per cent that had been predicted, though it would be some time before an official figure was given.

It was largely deserted throughout the day in many cities of the Sunni Triangle — north and west of Baghdad, particularly Fallujah, Ramadi and Beiji. In Baghdad's mainly Sunni Arab area of Azamiyah, the neighbourhood's four polling centres did not open at all, residents said. A low Sunni turnout could undermine the new government and worsen tensions in the country.

In a reminder of the dangers that persist, a British C-130 military transport plane, capable of carrying over 100 passengers, crashed north of Baghdad. There was no report of casualties.

Casting his vote, interim Prime Minister Mr Ayad Allawi said it was going to be 'the first time the Iraqis will determine their destiny'.

Egyptian President Mr Hosni Mubarak telephoned Mr Allawi to congratulate him on the election, saying he hoped it would 'open the way for the restoration of calm and stability'. Prominent Iraqi Sunni politician Mr Adnan Pachachi, who in recent



WITH FAITH IN THE BALLOT: An eighty-year-old disabled voter on his way to a polling station in the Kurdish city of Sulaymaniya. — AFP

months had called for the vote to be postponed because of violence, told CNN that he was 'relieved and encouraged' by a turnout that he said was 'better than expected', even in Fallujah and Mosul.

Voting was heavy in Shiite and mixed Shiite-Sunni neighbourhoods in Baghdad but low in some Sunni areas. Today's polls will elect a 275-member National Assembly and 18 provincial legislatures. The assembly will draw

up Iraq's new Constitution and select a President and his two deputies, who in turn will name a new Prime Minister and a Cabinet to serve for 11 months until fresh elections are held.

More reports on page 2



# Iraqis ink their verdict today

with Arab Ugraw

## But Violence Threatens To Mar First Elections In 50 Years

By Rashmee Z Ahmed/TNN

**Southern Iraq:** Amid mounting tension, violence and terrorist threats to wash the streets with voters' blood, Iraq begins voting on Sunday in its first democratic parliamentary elections in 50 years, a unique experiment in bringing Western-style democracy to the Arab world.

Iraq—and much of the world—is holding its breath as violence continued its deathly toll, killing 10 locals and five US troops on Friday in central Iraq, while a car bomb placed by suspected Sunni extremists exploded next to a police station in the Sunni-Shia split southern town of Az Zubayr, killing an Iraqi police official. After Sunday, Iraq will have become a historical oddity—the first real-time war zone to try and replace bullet with ballot while foreign guns, fighter jets and tanks keep the peace.

British troops, meanwhile, conducted



**A Germany-based Iraqi woman undergoes security check on her way to casting her vote at a Munich polling station on Saturday**

► The face of new Iraq, Page 11

a massive security clampdown in their fiefdom—the crucial, oil-exporting south-east—arresting four insurgents suspected of involvement in a bomb plot against polling stations in Basra.

Even as expatriate Iraqis began voting in 14 countries around the world, UN secretary general Kofi Annan appealed to

Iraqis in the motherland to vote and not to be cowed down by threats against taking the “crucial first step” towards stability. US President Bush declared that the advent of democracy in Iraq would be a powerful example to reformers throughout West Asia. “Freedom is on the march, and the world is better for it,” he said. However, there is little sign that these hopeful messages from the outside world are penetrating a country where fear of violence has caused the interim government to hermetically seal it off.

US jets roar over Baghdad in a show of strength but the terror network led by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi remains defiant, warning Iraqis that they would only have themselves to blame if they were killed or injured in election day attacks. “Beware not to approach the centres of atheism and vice,” the group said in a statement on an Islamist website. “We repeat our warning to the owners of homes surrounding voting centres so that the shelling doesn’t reach them. We have warned you, so don’t blame us. You have only yourselves to blame,” it said.



58-11  
3271

# Booths attacked on Iraq poll-eve

ASSOCIATED PRESS

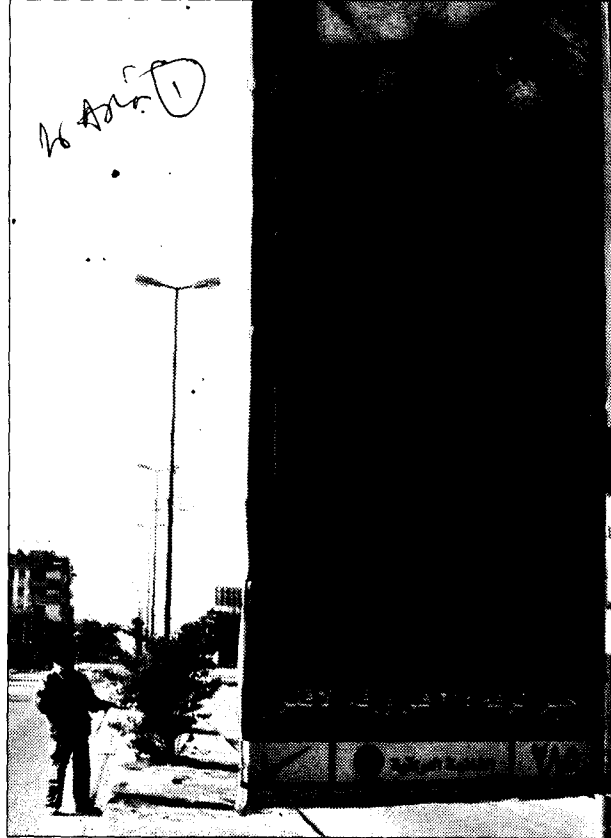
BAGHDAD, Jan. 29. — A suicide bomber attacked a police station in a Kurdish town, killing eight people, and insurgents blasted polling places across the country today on the eve of landmark elections in which the President acknowledged many Iraqis would not vote because of fears for their lives. The Iraq government also renewed its state of emergency for another 30 days.

Two people were killed and four injured late today when a rocket or mortar hit the US Embassy in Baghdad.

One round fell into the embassy's compound in the heavily fortified Green Zone in central Baghdad, an official said.

Iraqi police and soldiers set up checkpoints through streets largely devoid of traffic as the nation battened down for the vote, with a night-time curfew imposed across the country and the borders sealed.

In Ramadi, five Iraqis with hands tied behind their backs were found slain today on a city street. One of the bodies



**An Iraqi security member stands near a defaced election poster of Iraqi interim Prime Minister Mr Iyad Allawi in Basra on Saturday. — AFP**

was decapitated. . . Sunni extremists have warned Iraqis not to participate in tomorrow's election, threatening to "wash

the streets" in blood. President Ghazi al-Yawer acknowledged that the violence and insurgent threats will keep large

numbers of Iraqis from going to the polls. — though he insisted few would stay away because of calls for a boycott by some Sunni clerics who say the vote is illegitimate.

The suicide attack occurred in Khanaqin, 110 km north-east of Baghdad on the Iranian border.

South of Baghdad, rebels opened fire on US Marines and Iraqi forces as they placed concrete blast barriers around polling stations south of the capital today.

Attacks on polling stations were reported in at least eight cities from Dohuk in the far north to Basra in the south.

US and Iraqi forces have imposed strict security measures, including sealing the country's borders, closing Baghdad's international airport, extending the hours of the curfew to cover from 7 p.m. to 6 a.m. and restricting private vehicles.

Militant groups have taken their campaign of intimidation to the Internet, posting threats of bloodshed and video footage of grisly slayings in hopes of scaring people away from the polls.

30 JAN 2005

THE STATESMAN

# Zarqawi slaughters candidate as warning

## Major security clampdown before landmark elections

Agencies  
Baghdad, January 28

THE AL-QAIDA terror network led by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi issued a fresh warning on Friday against this weekend's national balloting, telling Iraqis that they will only have themselves to blame if they are killed or injured in election day attacks.

And, to drive his point home, Zarqawi's supporters posted a video on the Internet of their murder of a candidate in the country's historic elections from the party of Prime Minister Iyad Allawi.

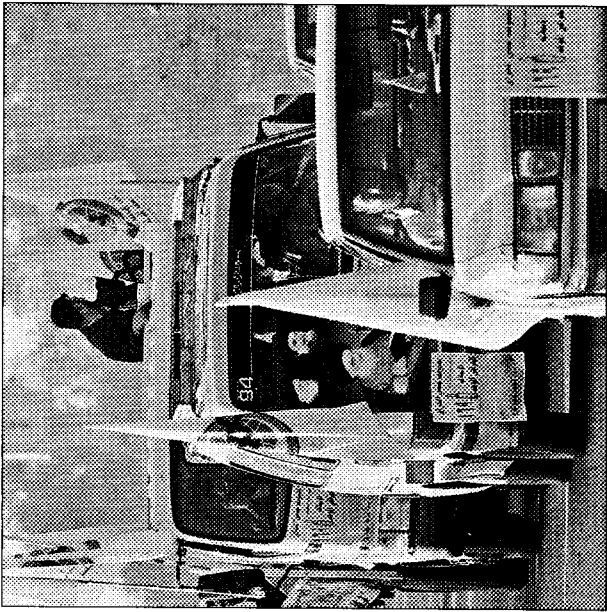
The al-Qaida Group in the Land of Two Rivers announced on Sunday on a website that it had executed Salem Jaafar al-Kanani, "secretary of the traitor Iyad Allawi", and a video would be released at a later time.

In the video, Kanani makes a "confession" and calls for Iraqis, especially the young, "not to collaborate with the enemy gunned down with several bullets."

"Beware, beware not to approach the centers of atheism and of vice," Zarqawi's group said in a statement posted on Islamic website. The statement's authenticity couldn't be verified.

Authorities in Iraq have arrested two close associates of Zarqawi, including the chief of the terror mastermind's Baghdad operation, the government said on Friday.

Meanwhile, Iraq clamped tough security measures across the country on Friday, sealing land borders



ON ROAD TO DEMOCRACY Iraqis campaign for the United Iraqi Alliance candidates in Basra on Friday.

## US to withdraw troops if Iraq asks

US PRESIDENT George W. Bush said in an interview on Thursday that he would withdraw US troops from Iraq if the new government that is elected on Sunday asked him to do so, but that he expected Iraq's first democratically elected leaders would want the United States to remain as helpers, not as occupiers. "I've heard the voices of the people that presumably will be in positions of responsibility after these elections, though you never know," Bush said. "But it seems that most of the leadership there understands that there will be a need for coalition troops at least until the Iraqis are able to fight."

NYT, Washington

and curbing travel to foil insurgents bent on wrecking Sunday's election, but a car bomb killed four people in Baghdad. Iraq's government is imposing extraordinary security restrictions to try to safeguard the polls. Land borders were closed from Friday and travel between provinces inside the country is also banned.

## A HISTORIC step for Iraq

Iraq's first independent election in nearly 50 years takes place on January 30. Voter turnout in the face of rebel threats is considered key as Iraq prepares to take the first step toward democratic self-rule after decades of oppression

### The day of election

Sweeping security measures will be in place for Sunday's election - sealing the borders, restricting travel, stationing Iraqi police and soldiers at polling stations

Each voter's identity is checked before entering polling area

Each receives two paper ballots - one for the National Assembly, the other for provincial legislatures\*

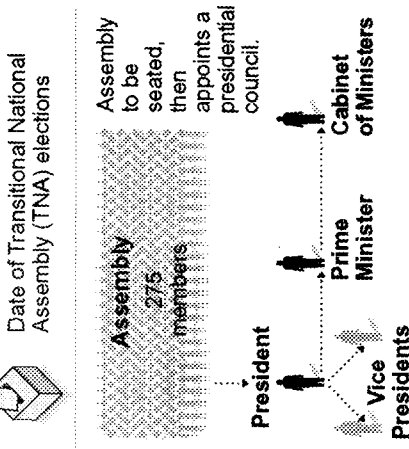
Ballots are marked in a cardboard booth, then handed to an election worker

Workers drop ballots into collection box

Exiting voter's hand will be marked with ink to prevent repeat voting

\* Voters in Kurdish-controlled areas get a third ballot for their parliament

### The plan for self-government



Assembly drafts a permanent constitution.

Iraqis vote on the draft constitution.

If constitution passes, voters elect permanent government. If charter rejected, Iraqis elect a new transitional assembly and the process starts over.

Permanent government seated, if constitution is in place.

### THE IRAQ POPULATION

25.4 million people, about 14.0 million eligible in Iraq, 1.2 million abroad

### MAJOR ETHNIC GROUPS

Arab up to 80% Kurds up to 20%

### RELIGIOUS

Muslim 97% Shia 60% to 65%

Sunni 32% to 37% Christian or other 3%

### THE CHOICES

#### Number of candidates

United Iraqi Alliance (228)

The Iraqi List (233)

Iraqis Party (80)

Kurdish Alliance List (165)

Assembly of Independent Democrats (78)

National Democratic Party (48)

The People's Union (275)

National Rafidain List (28)

#### Makeup

Shias

Shias and Sunnis

Shias and Sunnis

Kurds

Shias and Sunnis

Sunnis

Secular

Assyrian Christians

# Election and Iraq's sovereignty

By Jonathan Steele

140-10  
25/11

**S**TROLL, IF you dare, along the Shatt al Arab, the fast-flowing waterway that connects Basra to the Persian Gulf, and you come across a sad looking park. Where children shrieked on roundabouts and families enjoyed the shade on summer evenings, birds are now the only living creatures behind padlocked gates.

The invading British expropriated the park, and put it inside a no man's land overlooked by gun turrets, when they took over the palace complex Saddam Hussein built a little further along the waterfront.

Now the dictator's compound is a smaller version of Baghdad's green zone, housing the British and American consulates and loads of portakabins for security guards and other contractors. Iraqi workers are busy digging ground for a swimming pool.

The British consulate must surely be the most secluded, and the most bizarre, in the world, a sprawling sandstone villa behind 12-foot-high concrete walls and three rows of razor wire strung through the water.

Two tugs chunter down the river, pushing what appear to be empty barges. "Oil smugglers," says a diplomat as two British patrol boats speed past in the opposite direction, taking no notice. "There are probably a thousand tonnes in each one."

Ancient lawlessness, lost amenities, and foreign occupiers are not all one sees in Basra these days. An election campaign has been unfolding here which has been touted as a major turning point in Iraq's return to normality. It has certainly been livelier and more trouble-free than elsewhere in Iraq.

Election posters are sprouting on walls like ivy, including those of polling stations, in what will be a violation of the rules if they are not taken down before Sunday.

As most Shias want to vote, the risk of violence is relatively low, though

you would not know it from the Baghdad-style precautions the British are taking. British tank units were even doing exercises this week for what they call the doomsday scenario — how to retake Basra if militias of the radical cleric Moqtada al Sadr were to seize it.

Whoever wins, much will be made of the turnout figure, as it always is when polls take place during insurgencies. Every vote will be described by the British and U.S. Governments

logistical challenge. They produce winners and losers, and if they are successful they give a real sense of achievement. But how much do they really change things?"

It's a question many Iraqis are asking. Security, the water supply, long hours of power cuts, and petrol shortages remain as bad as they were last year, if not worse. Joblessness is huge, as is disappointment that the Government still seems powerless in spite of the much-vaunted "transfer"

Even the most anti-occupation nationalists are torn between wanting a rapid departure of foreign troops and worries about surviving until nightfall.

Add to that the fear, almost certainly exaggerated, that religious extremists will come to power, and you begin to understand the worries of secular progressives. Although insecurity has increased under Prime Minister Iyad Allawi, some will vote for him in the hope that he will become the strong hand which he has not yet been. In this desperate process many secular democrats discredit their own values.

The real battlelines in Iraq are not so much between Sunnis and Shias as between those who go along with the occupation and those who resist it. We may be witnessing the Vietnamisation of the war, as the guerrilla insurgency puts down roots in more and more cities to the north and west of Baghdad and starts to take the fight to the districts of Baghdad.

Haifa Street, close to the capital's very heart, is already becoming a no-go area. In the future more areas of the city may see roving guerrilla checkpoints. If the U.S. follows the brutal tactics it adopted against Falluja and inflicts them on other population centres, the insurgency will spread even faster.

Sunday's election will show that you can manage to hold an election in the midst of an insurgency. It will therefore be hailed as a logistical and democratic triumph. But it will not solve Iraq's central problem: how to restore the country's sovereignty.

The paradox of the landscape that will become clear after Sunday's election is that only by fixing a timetable for the departure of foreign troops will Iraq have any chance of stability, yet the government which will take office will probably neither want nor dare to do it. — ©Guardian Newspapers Limited 2005

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## *Iraq's Shias want to vote, but do not want to legitimise the occupation.*

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as a vote against terrorism and against those who called for a boycott. Washington and London also trumpet the huge number of party lists on the ballot as though quantity alone guarantees choice. In fact the differences between the various lists and candidates' programmes is minimal.

The key issue of how long the occupation should continue has not been debated. This leaves the many Iraqis who want to see an early end to it in a dilemma. A contested election is undoubtedly seen by many Iraqis as a historic step forward. On the down side, the vote gives legitimacy to the occupation, especially when no party on the ballot is campaigning unambiguously for the troops' departure.

Very few Iraqis talk of the invasion as a liberation these days. The vast majority call it an occupation, yet they see no party or candidate articulating that viewpoint. So the sense of powerlessness and disenfranchisement persists.

"The west loves elections in conflict-ridden countries," a veteran U.N. official commented after the Afghan poll last autumn. "They create a

of sovereignty last June. Will the new one be any better? Will it even produce a different line-up of faces?"

The Americans will undoubtedly urge the new Government to include Sunni politicians, even though the main Sunni parties are boycotting the poll. Diplomats talk of a "corrective mechanism" by which Sunnis can be appointed to the constitution-drafting commission that the newly elected assembly will oversee.

While this may be laudable as a technique to lessen the risk of civil war, it serves to undermine the validity of the poll if unelected people are appointed to key institutions afterwards.

It also begs the question of whether American policies — excessive use of force in Sunni areas, and the use of Shia militias in the new Iraqi army in the campaign against Sunni insurgents — are not a bigger factor in exacerbating sectarian tensions than this election's regional imbalance.

The urban middle class is spooked by the violence. The fears that the few foreign civilians in Iraq have for their own safety is nothing to what Iraqis feel for themselves and their families. There is no "green zone" for them.

29 JAN 2005

THE HINDU

# Iran warns U.S. against attack

By Atul Aneja

MANAMA, JAN. 24. Iran has described the spate of recent threats from top American administration functionaries as "psychological warfare," but said that a military attack on the country would be a major "strategic mistake."

The Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman, Hamid Reza Asafi, said on Sunday "We consider (U.S. threats) to be psychological warfare, unless someone wants to make a major strategic mistake."

## "Trouble spot"

The U.S. President, George W. Bush, last week had said that he did not rule out a military attack on Iran. While expressing support for a diplomatic settlement of Iran's nuclear programme, Mr. Bush stated, "I will never take any option off the table." U.S. administration officials over the week have amplified Mr. Bush's stance. The U.S. Vice-President, Dick Cheney, said Iran was "right at the top of the list" of global trouble spots and did not rule out Israel launching an attack against it. The U.S. Secretary of State nominee, Condoleezza Rice, listed Iran among six "out-

posts of tyranny."

Apart from the official spokesman, Iran's Intelligence Minister, Ali Yunesi, has also responded to the American assertions. He said the U.S. threats against Iran could not be translated into reality. "It would be the biggest and most stupid mistake if the U.S. tried to materialise its threats against Iran. Iran is neither Afghanistan nor Iraq. Iran is the entire Islamic world and all of history. It will neutralise any plot through its great national, military, and international power and capabilities," he said.

Mr. Yunesi said Iran had nevertheless taken all the required precautionary measures. "All military, security, economic, and political measures were adopted three years ago. Iran expects to see no threat, but at the same time, it has adopted all precautionary measures."

## Commando operations

He also dismissed the report by U.S. investigative journalist, Seymour Hersh, who had, in a recent article asserted that American commandoes, with Pakistani help, had infiltrated eastern Iran, and had launched a covert operation focusing on its nuclear programme.

A subsequent report in *Asia Times Online* said that Pakistan has provided extensive facilities to special United Kingdom and U.S. units to train them in commando operations in Pakistan's port city of Karachi, which in many ways resembles the Iranian cities of Teheran, Shiraz, Isfahan and other urban centres.

"Today, we have the most secure land, maritime, and air borders and no American or non-American dares to set foot upon Iranian soil," Mr. Yunesi said.

He said one of the objectives of the U.S. threats was to influence the European Union against Iran. "The Americans make those remarks against Iran in order to influence the ongoing nuclear talks between Iran and Europe," he said.

In a related development, the Iranian English daily *Teheran Times*, which is known to be close to a section of Iran's hardline establishment, warned in a front page commentary, "There is no room for Bush's recent remarks about Iran's peaceful nuclear activities ... Due to its geopolitical location, social potential and deterrent power, Iran will hand the U.S. a bitter pill to swallow."

25 JAN 2005 THE HINDU

# Will ballots prevail over bullets?

By Rashmee Z Ahmed/TNN

**Basra:** Six days before Iraq goes to what is being billed as the world's first real-time election in a real-time war zone and an unwilling, tenuously-prepared Basra has become the crucible of President Bush's stated mission to replace tyranny with democracy in Iraq, West Asia and across the world.

But there is no guarantee ballot will successfully replace bullet even here in the one place it might reasonably be expected to happen, the lead province of largely pro-election Shia south-eastern Iraq.

On Sunday, Basra's relentlessly upbeat chief election official, Saeed Abdul Sahib al-Battatt, was forced to admit there were mishaps here and there, little explosions, even in this, post-Saddam Iraq's supposedly safest, British-controlled sector.

He had published the names of independent candidates nine days ago, he told TOI, in an attempt to bust the myth that Iraq's election officials are too scared even to tell voters the names of their prospective representatives.

Al-Battatt, a Shia who

leads 15,000 Iraqi officials of Basra's Independent Election Commission (IECI) in the mammoth task of registering one-million voters.



brushed aside threatened Sunni violence and extremist Shia intimidation. The January 30 election, he declared, would be a great success with a great turnout.

The IECI's boast comes just four days after a suicide bomb attack on the British Army's large and crucial logistics base at Shaibah, 20 miles south of Basra city. The attack was claimed by Jordanian-born militant Abu Musab al-Zarqawi and more are threatened. And yet the chief spokesman of the British Army's South-East Division and disparate Western intelligence sources say they are pinning their hopes on an election success story coming out of hitherto-quiet Basra.

► Voters threatened, Page 13

# Iraq's flawed election

By Atul Aneja

100-1971

**V**IOLENCE AND confusion reign in Iraq as the countdown to the January 30 election enters its final phase. At least 100 people were killed in a spate of suicide car bombings, roadside explosions and gunfire in the third week of January alone.

Amid the violence, the elusive Jordan-born militant Abu Musab Al Zarqawi has acquired an unusually high profile. Most of his recent attacks have targeted Shias, who are in a majority in Iraq. Al Zarqawi has also denounced Iraq's top Shia spiritual leader, Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani, for his disinclination to condemn the brutal American invasion of the Sunni stronghold of Fallujah in November.

The Jordanian militant's actions appear focussed on driving a wedge between Iraq's Shias and Sunnis. Unlike Sunnis, most of whom have decided to boycott the polls, the Shia clergy is urging its followers to participate in the upcoming elections in large numbers.

The United Iraqi Alliance (UIA), a Shia-dominated grouping that has Ayatollah Sistani's blessings, is the frontrunner in the polls to elect a Transitional National Assembly.

Al Zarqawi's transparent anti-Shia stance, which raises the possibility of Iraq's disintegration along sectarian lines, has led to questions about his real antecedents.

Many progressive American and British academicians have hinted that Al Zarqawi has a hidden agenda, and could have links with western

and allied intelligence agencies.

Alex Callinicos, who teaches at The University of York, recently wrote: "I find some incidents — for example, the drive-by killings of Shias in towns south of Baghdad, allegedly by Salafist militants — very suspicious. Confronted with this kind of pattern, it is only rational... to remember the long

unknown since journalists' travel is restricted by security fears."

Most of the influential Sunni political parties, including the well-known Iraqi Islamic Party, are staying out of the polls. The powerful Association of Muslim Scholars has issued a poll boycott call. It says the upcoming elections would not have

they have chosen to be grouped, because of the fear of militants. Consequently Iraqi voters find themselves voting "blindly" in several cases, unable to identify candidates of their choice on the list.

Besides, even if the name of the preferred candidate were to be found on a popular slate, it would not necessarily mean that he or she would be elected. This is because of the system of proportional representation that has been adopted.

The number of individuals elected to the Assembly will depend on the percentage of votes that a slate has polled. For instance, if a slate showed the names of 275 candidates and got 20 per cent of the vote, only 55 of its members, who could be randomly picked, would enter the new assembly.

The legitimacy of the election has also been widely called into question. The polls supervised by the United Nations in 1999 in East Timor are seen as a model of legitimate elections under occupation. But in the case of Iraq, the U.N. is not in charge of ensuring that balloting is free and fair. The U.N. has only a token presence in Iraq; and most of its supervisory work will be conducted from the Jordanian capital Amman, nearly 1,000 km away.

Besides, in the case of East Timor the occupying Indonesian army was sufficiently monitored and dissuaded from interfering in the polls. No such deterrent that would restrain interference from the military is in place in Iraq.

## *The upcoming election in Iraq is unlikely to lead to the formation of a truly representative national assembly.*

and bloody history of the CIA, SIS, and the rest of the Anglo-American dirty tricks empire."

The violence is likely to keep voter turnout in the elections low. Contrary to the impression conveyed by the mainstream media that the Iraqi resistance is confined to the "Sunni triangle" — a relatively small area that exists in and around Baghdad — the influence of the guerrillas is spread over a much larger area. Associated Press writer Denis D. Gray has documented the geographical spread of the resistance in Iraq. He points that "At least six provinces — Baghdad, Anbar, Diyala, Salahuddin, Kirkuk and Nineveh — have been the scene of significant attacks on U.S. troops and Iraqi authorities. The only areas not plagued by bloodshed are the three northern provinces controlled by Kurds. The situation in many areas, however, is

The cumbersome procedure of elections to the 275-member Assembly is also likely to keep the voters away. In most cases, Iraqis are not choosing individuals but parties or coalition slates under which contesting individuals have been clubbed. Besides, many of the contestants have not revealed their names on the slates under which

25 JAN 2005

THE HINDU

# Iraqi democracy: Reality check

As the historic elections draw near, JAMES HIDER and RICHARD BEESTON find resentment, fear and confusion among ordinary Iraqis



WRITING ON THE WALL: A US soldier sprays over a graffiti that reads "Entering Fallujah is not the end game". In Mosul, during a pre-election house-to-house search for illegal weapons. — AFP

**F**REEDOM, President Bush said in his inauguration speech, "must be chosen and defended by citizens, and sustained by the rule of law."

In Baghdad, the crucible of his mission to replace tyranny with democracy, there is little sign of the rule of the law, and how many Iraqis will dare to exercise their new-found right to vote in Sunday's elections remains to be seen. A poll released by the International Republican Institute suggested 80 per cent of Iraqis were likely to vote, but those questioned by *The Times* in Baghdad and Mosul were less certain. Most agree the elections are an event of exceptional importance, the first opportunity they have



**'Democracy is the answer, but not when it comes from abroad'**

ever had to flex their democratic muscle. The elections will choose a 275-seat Parliament, which will in turn appoint a new government and President and draw up a new Constitution.

But many Iraqis feel intimidated by fanatical extremists bent on derailing the ballot by attacking either the 5,500 polling stations or those who vote. Many are confused by a campaign where more than 7,400 candidates are standing on the "lists" of no less than 111 parties or alliances. Many candidates are returned exiles, few dare show their faces and some will not even name themselves for fear of assassination.

Decades of dictatorship have left an ingrained suspicion of politics. Some argue that an election held with 170,000 foreign troops on their soil, and with a low-level conflict being fought across the heartland, cannot be free and fair. Few of Iraq's Sunni minority are expected to vote, either from fear of reprisal or because the elections will inevitably transfer power to the country's Shia majority. In short, Bush's policy of championing worldwide democracy is about to encounter its first serious reality check.

**FARIS HAZEM, 31, Christian Arab mechanic in Mosul**

I do not know whether I will vote. If everyone else does then maybe I will. I do not know who is standing, I have not seen any candidates, I do not know what the different parties stand for.

I am a Christian. It is dangerous for us in Mosul. It is dangerous to be seen talking to you and the Americans. I know all the people in my neighbourhood and they are all right. But people come from outside and they make trouble.

Look at the slogans written in front of my house, on the wall of the school across the road: "Down with Allawi. Down with the elections. We warn everyone against voting. Long

live the Mujahideen (insurgents)." This is the only message about the election that I have seen.

It's not only the elections that are a problem. I'm a mechanic in Mosul's main car-repair area. The gunmen come there regularly. They kidnap mechanics and force them to build car

bombs. If you don't do it they kill you.

**ABU BALSAM, 50, agricultural engineer in Baghdad**

The elections are being held in very bad circumstances, and I'm not sure they will make any difference or carry much weight with the Iraqis. Also, we know nothing about the candidates or their manifestos. There may even be a change for the worse.

I think democracy is the answer to Iraq's problems, but not when it comes from abroad or from people who are Iraqis only in name.

I'm afraid to participate because of the security situation and I don't expect polling centres to be safe. I still haven't even received my voter registration card because the distributing agents didn't collect them from the ministry out of fear of being attacked. I don't know any of the people running except Allawi, whom I see on television."

**WUROOD SABAH, 21, student at Baghdad University**

It's our chance to finally get some security and stability. There will be positive change if all Iraqis participate. I think democracy is the answer to Iraq's problems, but I'm afraid some people have misinterpreted democracy. Another thing is we need strong leadership.

I'm not afraid because everything is in God's hands, including the election centres, but I admit I don't know where mine is. I live in Mah-

moudiyah (in the so-called Triangle of Death, south of Baghdad) and it's definitely not safe.

I don't know anybody but Allawi because I see his pictures in the street and I listen to the news on television. I haven't actually decided yet whom to vote for. After all, I don't know who they are and what they stand for.

**FADL QADDEM, 35, deputy secretary-general of the Free Iraqi Community Party**

What are these elections being held under occupation? There is no freedom for the voters and all the lists are all-American lists, lists of people who came in on US tanks. I don't think they will change anything because it's the same people since the fall of Saddam. My party is boycotting the elections. I believe in democracy, but not if you have elections that are being held under fire, and with the same methods which were used by the old regime. Many people will not participate out of fear.

Are polling centres safe? Are you joking? The whole of Iraq is unsafe, no one can walk in the street at night. I haven't received any threats but some of my colleagues said there are pamphlets in the streets threatening any Iraqi who participates in the elections.

**FATIMAH ALLI, 45, Baghdad housewife and retired teacher**

Of course it's important. For me this is the first time I've seen free elections in Iraq and it's the first time we'll have a real Constitution. It will



**'Are polling centres safe? Are you joking? The whole of Iraq is unsafe'**

change things, because it's a chance for women to go out and do what they want. I look to democracy as the only solution to Iraq's problems, which were caused by a dictatorship.

I will participate no matter what happens, but nobody has told me where the polling centre is. I watch television, I know some of the manifestos and personalities heading the lists. Many people told me they don't know, but it's up to you whether you want to find out or not.

**SAFAR, 30, a traffic police sergeant from Salman Pak, near Baghdad**

I think it's a new experiment for Iraqis, and there's a chance for Iraq to develop. There will be change, there will be widespread openness, and the possibility to re-enter the international community. Democracy will only work for us on one condition: those in power must work for the good of their country. I wouldn't say I am afraid to vote, but I am hesitating. Polling centres are not safe in Salman Pak. I don't really know much about the candidates or the lists.

**ADEL JAWAD, 30, policeman from Nahrawan, south of Baghdad**

I believe the elections are very important, as is participating, because voting is our path toward democracy. It will mark a great change for Iraq, because we will draft the Constitution and establish laws that will regulate everything in Iraq. And we will be able to kick out the US forces once we have stability and security.

I'm not afraid because the *merjaia* (Shia holy leaders) ordered us to vote. In our city of Nahrawan, the election centre is safe because of co-operation among police, the parties and the local people.

**SALAM ABDULLAH, 29, Kurdish soldier in the Iraqi National Guard**

I used to be a *peshmerga* (Kurdish militia fighter). Then after the war I joined the Iraqi National Guard. My battalion came here two months ago to help restore order in Mosul before the elections. It is a good job and most people seem pleased to us. It is important for Iraq and for the Kurdish people that they can choose their own government by themselves and decide their own future.

But it is dangerous work. Several of my comrades have been killed, but I'm not scared. I am sure after the polls the situation will calm down. Many of the people causing trouble here are not Iraqis, they come from other Arab nations. Maybe after the polls they'll go home.

I like Allawi. He is a good man. He has been a strong leader. But I will vote for the Kurdish list in the elections. It is important that the Kurds are well represented in the government.

**ALI HATEM, 33, Baghdad bus driver**

Elections are very important for Iraq's stability and security because at the moment I can't even work at night or find enough fuel for my bus. It will be a chance to have a better future for our sons. Right now in Iraq, democracy means you can do anything you want, including killing people in the street. But I'm not afraid to vote. I hope the polling stations are secure. I don't know the candidates. I only know Allawi and I will vote for him because he is a strong person and Iraq needs such a character.

— *The Times, London.*

## Zarqawi calls for all-out war

**BAGHDAD, JAN. 23.** Iraq's most wanted man Abu Musab al-Zarqawi today declared all-out war on next week's vote in his latest salvo to frighten Iraqis away from the poll.

The January 30 election is a "wicked trap aimed at putting the Rafidha (Shias) in the seat of power in Iraq," said the voice attributed to Mr. Zarqawi, in a message posted on an Islamic Web site.

It was the second inflammatory message from the Al-Qaeda frontman in Iraq since Thursday as he sought to instigate violence among the fractious mix of Shias and Sunnis ahead of the first free elections in half a cen-

tury. Since Friday, rebels have responded to Mr. Zarqawi's rebel call as car bombs have torn apart a Shia mosque and wedding party in the Baghdad region, killing nearly 30 persons. A third car bomb wounded six Iraqi National Guards outside the Shia city of Hilla.

A leading Shia politician Abdel Aziz Hakim — whose list is expected to sweep the elections — said the attacks were the latest effort by Mr. Zarqawi and other extremists trying to stoke civil war.

Seeking to stave off a bloodbath, the Interior Minister, Falah Naquib, announced a tough package of security measures

yesterday that would effectively seal Iraq off from the outside world for the elections.

Mr. Naquib warned that the Government was prepared for the worst as the militancy sought to deter Iraqis from casting a ballot for the 275-seat Parliament that would draft Iraq's permanent constitution.

### Hostages

Chinese officials were today trying to track down eight nationals after they were reportedly freed by their captors in Iraq on a promise from Beijing to ban any more of its citizens from entering the country. — AFP



# Zarqawi declares war on Iraq elections

Associated Press  
Baghdad, January 23

IRAQ'S MOST feared terror chief declared a "fierce war" on democracy in a new audio recording posted on Sunday on the Web, as insurgents attacked another polling station to be used in next weekend's landmark elections.

Rebels who've promised to disrupt the January 30 vote also raided a police station in the western city of Ramadi, ordering officers out of the building and seizing their weapons, police Lt. Omar al-Duleimi said. US-trained security forces have been frequent targets of rebel attacks.

US and Iraqi officials fear a spike in bloodshed and have announced massive security measures to protect voters from possible insurgent attacks during the elections. Voters will choose a 275-seat National Assembly and provincial councils in Iraq's 18 provinces.

In the audiotape, a speaker identifying himself as Abu Musab al-Zarqawi — the leader of Iraq's al-Qaida affiliate — called candidates running in the elections "demi-idols" and said those who vote for them "are infidels".

"We have declared a fierce war on this evil principle of democracy and those who follow this wrong ideology," the speaker said. "Anyone who tries to help set up this system is part of it" — a clear warning to both candidates and those who choose to vote.

The speaker warned Iraqis to be careful of "the enemy's plan to implement so-called democracy in your country". He said the Americans have engineered the election to install Shia Muslims in power.

The insurgency in Iraq is largely fought by extremists from the Sunni

## SECURITY MEASURES

• In many areas, election staff intend to keep the location of polling stations secret until the last minute

• Iraq's borders will be closed for three days around the election

• Baghdad's airport is to be closed for two days

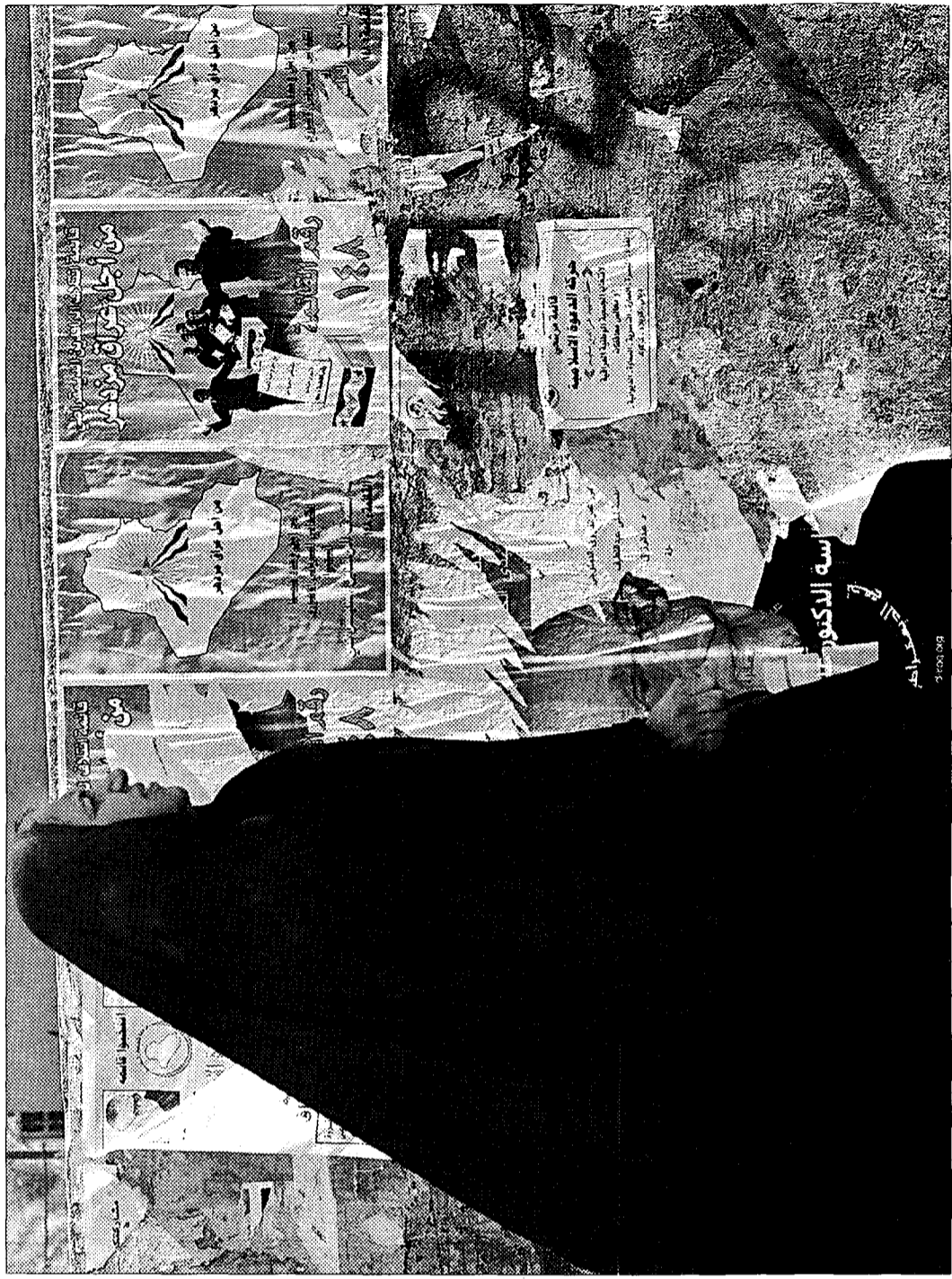
• The movement of pedestrians and cars close to polling stations will also be restricted, and non-official cars will be prevented from travelling between Iraq's 18 provinces

• People will be barred from carrying weapons

Arab minority, a community that lost influence and privilege with the fall of their patron Saddam Hussein.

The election has further split the rival religious communities, with Iraq's Shia majority embracing the vote as a chance to cement their new power and many Sunnis calling for a boycott of the vote to protest US military action in Sunni areas like Fallujah. "Four million Shias were brought from Iran to take part in the elections to achieve their aim of winning" most of the positions, the speaker in the tape said.

He railed against democracy for supplanting the rule of God with the rule of man and the majority, saying it was based on un-Islamic beliefs and behaviours.



An Iraqi woman in front of torn election posters pasted on a Baghdad wall on Sunday.

AFF

# Iran brushes off US attack threat

Tehran, Jan. 23 (Reuters): Iran, responding to comments by senior US officials, said today any US military attack on the country would be a strategic mistake and dismissed the US remarks as "psychological warfare".

President George W. Bush last week said military action against Iran's nuclear programme had not been ruled out and Vice-President Dick Cheney said Iran topped the list of world trouble spots and Israel could decide to bomb its nuclear facilities.

But Iran's foreign ministry spokesperson Hamid Reza Asefi said: "We think the chance (of a US military at-

tack) is very low unless someone wants to make a major strategic mistake."

"Logically speaking, we don't think this is going to happen," he told a weekly news conference.

Iranian officials, including President Mohammad Khatami, said last week Iran would respond vigorously to any attack.

Analysts have said Tehran has ballistic missiles capable of striking Israel or US bases in the Gulf and can easily stir up violence in Iraq, Afghanistan and Palestine through proxy agents and militant groups it backs.

Asefi, echoing comments

by other senior Iranian officials, dismissed the US remarks as "psychological warfare".

"These kind of remarks are clear examples of cultural and religious war which will only lead to people's hatred of US policies ... and will isolate America more than before," he said.

An article in *The New Yorker* magazine this month said the US was conducting secret reconnaissance missions in Iran to help identify potential nuclear, chemical and missile targets.

But Iranian intelligence minister Ali Yunesi dismissed the report by Pulitzer prize-

winning journalist Seymour Hersh. "This person is crazy. He thinks Iran is chaotic and that whoever wants to enter the country can easily do so," the *Isna* students news agency quoted Yunesi as saying today. "If it was so, the Americans would have achieved their goals much sooner."

Pentagon officials have said the *New Yorker* report was "riddled with errors".

Asefi said Cheney's comments about Israel attacking Iran's nuclear facilities underscored the influence Israel had on US foreign policy.

"Iran has always said that Tel Aviv decides US policies and that the Zionist lobby is so

powerful in the United States, therefore we were not surprised by such remarks," he said.

Iran says its nuclear programme is peaceful and will be used only to generate electricity, not to build atomic bombs. "The Americans believe they can impose their demands and use force," Asefi said.

"We're expecting Bush in his second term to pay more attention to the international community and organisations which were created to solve international problems and to handle the countries that are not following international demands."

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# 8 Chinese hostages freed in Iraq

Videotape Shows Beheading Of Two Iraqis On Sidewalk

By Andrew Marshall

Baghdad: Insurgents in Iraq released eight Chinese labourers they had taken hostage and threatened to kill, as guerrillas launched more attacks on majority Shiites, expected to come out on top in the January 30 elections.

A videotape produced by the insurgents showed the Chinese standing or kneeling in two rows in the desert, holding their passports open for the camera. A man with his face covered by a traditional headdress then shook hands with each of the hostages before they walked off camera.

China's embassy in Baghdad later confirmed the eight had been freed.

On Tuesday, the guerrilla group hold-



A video footage of a Chinese hostage shaking hands with his captors

ing the men said it would kill them within 48 hours unless Beijing — which opposed the war in Iraq — explained why they were in the country.

In a sign of the insurgents' confi-

dence, a group beheaded an Iraqi soldier in broad daylight in the restive western rebel town of Ramadi. They left the body, still dressed in army fatigues, in the street with the severed head placed on the torso and a note warning other Iraqi troops to quit their jobs.

A videotape posted on the internet by the Al Qaida-linked insurgent group led by Jordanian militant Abu Mussab al-Zarqawi showed two other Iraqis who said they worked at a US base having their heads hacked off by militants on a sidewalk.

Another insurgent group, the Army of Ansar al-Sunna, said on its website it had killed 15 Iraqi soldiers it had captured.

## All roads lead to Iraq for crucial poll

For all that George Walker Bush never dared speak its name at last Thursday's inauguration of his 'second coming', all roads lead to Iraq. And that is where I'm headed. For, next Sunday, that tortured country, one-time cradle of civilisation, goes to the polls. For all that the world listened hard and thought deeply about the coming war for people's liberty to be waged by America's almost-Messianic president, he is saying something his chum Tony Blair recently intoned. Blair insisted it was wrong to categorise the American desire to extend democracy and human rights "throughout the Middle East (as a) neo-conservative agenda. Actually, if you put it in a different language, it is a progressive agenda."

So will this moral forward strategy for freedom come a cropper in Iraq and West Asia?

That reality is bleak. Iran is already accused of med-

dling too much and maliciously in Iraq's choice of its men of tomorrow. Saudi Arabia and Syria are charged with continuing to offer moral and monetary support to Iraqi insurgents, at least partly in alarm at the prospect of democracy taking root in Baghdad. Turkey is anxious that post-election mayhem would give the Kurds and Turkomans a secessionist surge.

So far, there is little to offer hope to all who fear Iraq will not metamorphose, overnight, into Bush-Blair's fancied democratic template for West Asia and "outposts of tyranny" all over the world. Had the US and UK not begun, 22 months ago, the onerous and ominously blood-stained process of literally bombing the Iraqi people into semi-democratic mode, they would have been the first to deplore the elec-

tions on behalf of "the international community".

And they would have been right. Just consider: Even though 7,785 candidates are competing for the 275-seat national assembly, this is campaigning by stealth. Or not at all. Security fears mean the candidates have not been named. The Independent Election Commission of Iraq (IECI) will publish the list some time soon, but don't expect it tomorrow because it is anxious to avoid too many registered candidates suffering posthumous victories and defeats.

The IECI is rightly conscious of the challenges presented by a country that is being forced to chart its democratic destiny at the point of a foreign gun, against the gory backdrop of suicide bombings and insurgent activity, even as the minority

Sunnis, one-fifth of the Iraqi people, threaten a boycott.

If it weren't so tragic, it would almost be laughable to see the chasm between Iraq as it heads for elections and Bush-Blair's Olympian vision of faster-higher-stronger freedom. The United Nations, which is supposed to be the "principal" agency supervising the polls, is hardly in evidence.

Both UN and Iraqi election officials admit the unique difficulties of holding a poll in which it's not just candidates at risk. The voters are too. Protecting the voter is a looming problem because Iraq will start its democratic millennium by using visible, indelible ink to prevent multiple voting, presumably by sections of a Shia majority drunk on the prospect of the sudden elevation to power.

Come January 30 and that visible indelible ink stain on the Iraqi finger will be like the mark of Cain. But, please God, not quite as murderous?

**EURO VISION**

Rashmee Z Ahmed

# US, UK look for early Iraq exit

WAS (1) 9/10/05 HT-13 2371  
Baghdad, January 22

PRIVATE MEMOS are circulating in Washington, Baghdad and London setting out detailed scenarios for withdrawal of US and British forces from Iraq as early as possible, a foreign office source said on Friday.

The policy papers have added urgency because a new Iraq government, to be elected next week if the election goes ahead on January 30 as planned, could set a target date for withdrawal.

John Negroponte, US ambassador to Baghdad, confirmed that a UN resolution declared that US and other forces would have to leave if requested by the Iraqi government. "If that's the wish of the government of Iraq, we will comply with those wishes. But no, we haven't

been approached on this issue — although obviously we stand prepared to engage the future government on any issue concerning our presence here."

The foreign office source said: "Of course, we think about leaving Iraq. There is no point in staying there. There are continually plans in Whitehall, Washington and Baghdad to withdraw when we can. "But there is no document saying we will leave in July 2005 or any other date. "That would be a mug's game. There are documents all over the place with different scenarios." Until recently, the British government was working to a rough target date of June next year but that appears to have been abandoned as over-optimistic.

Senior British military fi-

gures want to reduce the number of troops in Iraq as quickly as possible. But they also recognise that substantial numbers are likely to be there well into next year, and probably longer.

A defence source said British troops would pull out when the new Iraqi government wanted them to go. "We are not there yet by a long chalk," he said. Even if a decision was taken today, he said, it would take until the end of the year to extract troops and their equipment. The foreign office and ministry of defence were dismayed by the assessment of specialists sent out to review the progress of the Iraqi army. Only 5,000 of the 120,000-strong army was classified as being well enough trained to be dependable.

Guardian News Service

## 12 killed in attack

AT LEAST 12 people were killed and 25 injured in a suicide attack on a Shiite wedding party south of Baghdad, the chief of the village where the blast occurred said.

"Four children, a woman and seven men were killed in an attack on the house of Zayd Abbas al-Amiri in the village of Albu Amer," in Yusufiyah about 20 kilometers (12 miles) south of the capital, the chief said on condition of anonymity.

The attack was carried out with a booby-trapped ambulance driven by a suicide bomber late Friday, police said.

AFP, Yusufiyah

# Ultras claim killing 15 Iraqi guards

ASSOCIATED PRESS

BAGHDAD, Jan. 22. — An Iraqi insurgent group linked to the Al-Qaida said in a web statement posted today that it had killed 15 Iraqi National Guard members seized this month off a bus northwest of Baghdad.

"After the investigation, they confessed to the crimes they have committed with the crusader forces against civilians and mujahideen," the Ansar al-Sunnah group said in the statement.

"With God's help, God's verdict has been carried out against them by shooting them....They should be a lesson to others." The claim could not be independently verified, and the statement contained no photographs. Iraqi insurgents have targeted Iraqi military and security forces because they are less well-trained, less equipped and less protected than American and other multi-national troops.

Nine other Iraqi guardsmen and one Iraqi civilian were injured today when a suicide bomber detonated an explosive belt near the gate of a military camp near Hillah, Iraqi office said.

Guerrillas in Mosul blasted a building to be used as a polling station with machine gun and rocket propelled grenade fire today, injuring a civilian, a hospital official said.

## Chinese embassies try to contact freed hostages

BEIJING, Jan. 22. — China's embassies in Iraq and neighbouring countries are trying to contact the eight released Chinese citizens, the foreign ministry said today.

Eight Chinese hostages held by Iraqi insurgents have been released, the Al-Arabiya television station said today, citing a statement by their captors. "The eight Chinese were freed and handed to the Committee of Muslim Scholars," it reported.

Meanwhile, Al-Jazeera TV also reported that the Chinese hostages had been released by the armed group.

The Chinese government has been making every effort it can to secure the release of the eight Chinese workers. China says it has already warned its citizens to stay out of Iraq after kidnappers holding eight Chinese men said they would spare their lives if Beijing issued a travel ban.— **China Daily/ANN**

In Baghdad, the interior minister announced further security measures for the 30 January balloting, in which Iraqis will choose a new 275-member National Assembly and 18 provincial councils.

The minister, Falah al-Naqib, confirmed that Baghdad's international airport would be closed for three days starting on the eve of the balloting. The night time curfew in Baghdad and other cities will be extended and restrictions imposed on private vehicles to guard against car bombs, he added.

## 12 killed in wedding party attack

At least 12 people were killed and 25 injured in a suicide attack yesterday on a Shi'ite wedding party south of Baghdad, the chief of the village where the blast occurred said today, AFP adds from Yusufiyah

"Four children, a woman and seven men were killed in an attack on the house of Zayd Abbas al-Amiri in the village of Albu Amer" in Yusufiyah about 20 m south of the capital, the chief said.

# Elections in Iraq

By Hamid Ansari

200-1019611

MID GROWING chaos, Iraqi newspaper *Al-Adalah* has published the platform of the 16-party United Iraqi Alliance, the main Shia coalition sponsored by Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani. The Alliance is predominantly but not exclusively Shia; it is overwhelmingly but not exclusively Arab, and includes groups representing Shia Kurds and Turcomans. Its stated objectives are: a united Iraq with full sovereignty; a timetable for the withdrawal of multinational forces from Iraq; a democratic, federal and pluralist Iraq; an Iraq that would respect the Islamic identity of its people and have Islam as the state religion; guarantees for human rights and rights of religious and ethnic minorities against persecution and marginalisation; prevention of discrimination on grounds of sects, religion or ethnicity; a climate of peaceful co-existence without preferential treatment for any group; independence of judiciary and equal dispensation of justice to all; security, prevention of terrorism and de-politicised armed forces; participation of women in politics, economy and social life; education, social security, medical care and health insurance; and an independent foreign policy and membership of the Arab League and the Organisation of Islamic Conference.

Ayatollah Sistani's approach is clear enough. Given the sectarian mix, the election can only result in a

Constituent Assembly that would have a Shia and a UIA majority resulting in a decisive role in the framing of a new constitution. On one calculation, it may get 138 out of 275 seats, a clear 51 per cent majority. At that stage, the UIA would be in a strong position both to have its imprint on the Constitution and to ar-

disrupt the process and bleed and frighten away Iraqis who may be collaborating with the occupation forces in any capacity. Their success in this endeavour is considerable: 90 out of a total of 540 voter-registration sites are closed, 17 Sunni parties have sought a six-month postponement of elections, and another 15

wounded in battle and another 17,000 non-combatant sick or injured of whom 80 per cent do not return to their units.

*The New York Times* reported last month that one in six soldiers in Iraq showed symptoms of major depression, serious anxiety or post-traumatic stress disorder and that the number of such cases among returnees from Afghanistan and Iraq could exceed 100,000. It quoted an expert: "There is a train coming that is packed with people who are going to need help for the next 35 years."

As a result, the focus of commentary now is on a policy that failed and on the imperative need for an exit strategy. Brent Scowcroft, National Security Adviser to Bush (Senior), said this week that the elections have the potential of deepening the Iraqi conflict into a civil war, adding that the U.S. presence in Iraq is inflaming the Middle East. Another former NSA, Zbigniew Brzezinski, has said that if the situation cannot be changed drastically, the operation should be terminated since the alternative is to send in another 50,000 troops, spend an additional \$500 billion, and reintroduce military draft.

Other experts feel "U.S. goals have to shrink" and the President has to prepare public opinion for a revised definition of what constitutes victory!

(M. H. Ansari is a Distinguished Fellow at the Observer Research Foundation, New Delhi.)

## *The strategy of the 16-party United Iraqi Alliance is to institutionalise Shia majority and defer confrontation with the U.S. to a later stage.*

Sunni groups (including the Association of Muslim Scholars) have called for an outright boycott.

Even official sources are now admitting that elections in four Sunni provinces may not be held at all. In a move directed at the Sunni groups of Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia have urged "all the religious and political affiliations to participate in Iraqi elections so that no group would feel it is marginalised in future."

The impact of the deteriorating situation on American opinion is no less significant. Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld has sent a senior retired General to make an independent assessment. CBS has pointed out that U.S. casualty figures have been understated and given the actual figures as 1,230 dead, 9,300

for a withdrawal timetable and a policy of its choice. The strategy is to institutionalise Shia majority and defer contention with the U.S. to a later stage.

The Shia solidarity, however, is breached by dissent from Muqtada al-Sadr on whose behalf a declaration was read in a Sadr City mosque: "I as an Iraqi will not participate in the elections, and will not enter into this political game at all. Refusing to participate in the election gets you branded as an enemy of democracy, and if you participate in them you find that you have been caught in their game in such a way that you cannot escape."

A majority of the Sunni groups, on their part, apprehend that elections would settle matters decisively against them. Hence the campaign to

# Dutch firm on Iraq troop withdrawal

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AMSTERDAM, JAN. 17. The 1,400 Dutch troops stationed in the south of Iraq as part of the U.S.-led coalition will withdraw as planned on March 15, said the Dutch Prime Minister, Jan Peter Balkenende, on Monday.

Last week, Mr. Balkenende said his Government was open to a debate on extension, after parties representing a slim majority in Parliament said they would support extending the mission.

Washington has repeatedly pressed the Dutch to remain in Iraq, but after meeting his Defence and Foreign Ministers on Monday, Mr. Balkenende said an extension was not possible.

"I understand the feelings of the Americans and British, but even they cannot avoid the conclusion that the Netherlands has delivered a considerable contribution in that area of Iraq, with a considerable number of people, 1,400 soldiers," he told reporters in the Hague.

"We have kept to our commitment and our obligations."

The Dutch mission began in August 2003 in the southern Iraqi province of al-Muthana, under British command, and the British Government would decide how to replace the depart-

ing troops, Mr. Balkenende said. — AP

## Surge in violence

AFP reports from Baquba: The spiralling battle between militants and security forces killed dozens of people in 48 hours, as the top U.S. commander in Iraq today predicted that violence would disrupt the landmark elections.

With Iraq's first free polls in half a century just 13 days away, about 20 rebels ambushed an Army checkpoint near Baquba early today killing seven soldiers and a security guard.

The killings came after the Iraqi Army arrested around 60 persons in sweeps in the town of Bohrouz, south of Baquba, where militancy has popular support, said a local resident.

Seven policemen were killed and 15 wounded in a suicide car bomb outside a police station in Baiji, home to Iraq's largest oil refinery, a senior police officer said. Baiji and Baquba fall respectively within Salahuddin and Diyala, two of four provinces where U.S. and Iraqi officials fear militants will launch spectacular attacks aimed at deterring the local Sunni Muslim populace from voting.

# UKRAINE AND IRAQ

## Troops Withdrawal Hardly A Gift For The White House

By VIKTOR LITOVKIN

**T**he first major move of Ukraine's new leadership — and at the same time the last one of the previous authorities — was to withdraw their soldiers from Iraq. This is hardly surprising. Seven Ukrainian servicemen died when destroying an air bomb depot near Es Suweira in the province of Wasit. They included the commanding officer of the 72nd mechanised battalion, the commanding officers of a mechanised company and an engineer platoon, a senior liaison officer, the head of the electrical section of an engineer platoon, a squad leader from the same platoon and a female medic from a mechanised company.

### Planned act

Another wounded Ukrainian soldier died in a US military hospital in Baghdad. This was the 17th death the 1,640-strong Ukrainian troop contingent had suffered since Kiev joined the international peace-keeping coalition in Iraq. The tragic incident near Es Suweira also claimed the life of a soldier from a Kazakh separate engineer detached unit. Six Ukrainians and four Kazakhs were wounded.

Acting commander of Ukraine's Army Land Forces Lieutenant General Vladimir Mozharovsky said at a press conference in Kiev that he had reasons to believe that the explosion in the province of Wasit was a "planned act". Military officials believe that an explosive device was planted in one of the bombs and then detonated by remote control.

Ukrainian prosecutors launched criminal proceedings to investigate the tragedy, while the outgoing president, Leonid Kuchma, ordered the Interior Ministry and the Defence Ministry to start preparations for withdrawing Ukrainian peacekeepers from Iraq immediately.

Kiev has already calculated that it will cost the Defence Ministry at least a million dollars and will take at least four months, till the middle of this year. The withdrawal had earlier been scheduled to be completed by the end of 2005.

Washington reacted to Mr Kuchma's order with open irritation. A US state department

*The author is a military commentator associated with Ria Novosti*

ment spokesman, Adam Ereli, has already said that the decision should be up to the country's new president and government, not Mr Kuchma. Agence France Presse quotes the American official as saying that the US hopes that any changes related to the Ukrainian troops will be well considered and made in close



consultations with the coalition forces.

Washington's nervous reaction is understandable. The announcement of the withdrawal on the eve of the inauguration of George W Bush is hardly a gift for the White House. The decision casts doubt over all the US rhetoric about a quick victory over Iraqi and other international terrorists. Yet even Ukraine's president-elect, Viktor Yushchenko, insisted on withdrawing Ukrainian troops from Iraq in his campaign programme and the country's Parliament also approved the move.

### Kuchma as bad guy

However, the withdrawal at the end of 2005, which can yet be cancelled, is one thing, and urgent preparations for it is quite another thing. It is as quick as the Spanish government's move to pull its troops out after the train bombings in Madrid on 11 March, 2004. Mr Bush still cannot forgive Jose Luis Zapatero's government for the "surprise". He is even less likely to forgive Mr Kuchma. The White House has never liked the outgoing Ukrainian president, accusing him of every thinkable and unthinkable sin, up to support for the Iraqi dictator whom Kiev allegedly supplied with a Kolchuga radar system.

That the radar, like chemical weapons, has not been found in

Iraq does not matter. What matters to the Washington administration is that Mr Kuchma still appears to be a bad guy. His attempts to establish good relations with the US by sending Ukrainian peacekeepers to the Middle East were not duly appreciated, although criticism of him was toned down. It seems,

however, that the White House will never forgive Kuchma the attempt to save his soldiers and officers from unjustified deaths in the interests of another state.

Certainly, the bottom line is not Mr Kuchma or the announcement about the urgent withdrawal preparations, no matter what the reason might be — heavy casualties in the undeclared war against foreign terrorists or the decision taken by Parliament and the President. The real problem is that Washington's operation to occupy Iraq is becoming increasingly deadlocked. The White House and its allies have failed to create in Baghdad any capable government, army or law enforcement bodies. Many observers believe the elections to the legislature scheduled for late January are unlikely to bring peace and stability to the country. Efforts to reconcile and smooth out differences between Iraq's largest Muslim communities, the Sunnis and Shi'ites, have failed, as have attempts to solve the Kurd problem. Efforts to involve leading financial groups from the Arab East in Iraq's economic life and restoration of its industrial potential, the oil and oil refining sectors, have also failed. Yet even American firms have not managed to establish complete control over the country's mineral resources. Moreover, regular explosions on

oil pipelines and acts of sabotage on refineries cast doubt on the efficacy and real quick return of investment in the business.

However, the most important point is that more and more American soldiers and officers are dying in Iraq with every passing day. On 1 January, 2004 the official statistics reported 463 servicemen dead and 2,687 wounded. Accidents were responsible for 370 out of the deaths. Now the death toll has exceeded 1,350. It may be time to ask: what were these huge sacrifices made for? To export democracy? It sounds good, but has little in common with reality.

### No exit route

Democracy as Europe and America understand it will not come to the Middle East for at least another hundred years, even if 150,000 US servicemen remain there throughout. Even if we suppose that everything was planned to obtain the Middle East's oil and control prices (and there are reasons to think this), a barrel will still cost too much, because it will have to be measured in new human losses.

Unlike monetary terms, there is always a limit to this price. The US had to leave Korea, Vietnam and Somalia without securing victory. Yet the main problem is that the US cannot leave Iraq now or in the remote future. This would mean not just a collapse of Washington's whole Middle East and Central Asian policy, but also a capitulation to international terrorism, which, whether one wants to admit it or not, launched a large-scale offensive on the coalition troops in Iraq after Saddam Hussein was toppled. It would be impossible to retreat, yielding to the victor's mercy. This would only inspire new life in all kinds of terrorists. Then the apartment block explosions in Moscow, the train bombings in Madrid, the attacks on the World Trade Centre in New York and the Pentagon in Washington would seem just child's play.

So, unlike Kiev, Madrid and Amsterdam, as well as Warsaw, Budapest and Sofia, which are also talking about withdrawing their troops, Washington cannot make the move. This is why the White House is so irritated by any country deciding to leave Iraq.



# Ebadi runs arrest risk

Tehran, Jan. 16 (Reuters): Iranian Nobel laureate Shirin Ebadi said she was ready to face arrest for refusing to appear before the Islamic state's feared Revolutionary Court.

The human rights lawyer, who won the 2003 Nobel Peace Prize, has defied a judiciary order to attend the court on the ground that she was not informed of the charges she faced. Asked if she feared the judiciary would carry out its written threat to arrest her if she did not go to court by Sunday, Ebadi said: "In this country anything is possible."

Ebadi, the first Muslim woman to be awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, said the court had now told her that her case involved a civil suit brought by a private complainant.

This explanation further angered Ebadi, 57, who pointed out that the Revolutionary Court, which has jailed many intellectuals and political dissidents in the past, deals with national security issues.

"It is unprecedented for the Revolutionary Court to summon someone for a private suit and (for them to) be told that failure to appear would result in his or her arrest," she said.

"I believe the Revolutionary Court has diverted from the principle of impartiality regarding my summons and I hope it will be addressed by

the judicial authorities."

Ebadi said she hoped her stand against the judiciary would end the common practice of courts issuing a summons without informing the defendant of the charges.



Ebadi: Courting trouble

# Ultras abduct three, kill one in Iraq

9/11  
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ASSOCIATED PRESS

BAGHDAD, Jan. 8. — Militants abducted three senior Iraqi officials, beheaded an Iraqi who worked for the US military and killed at least four other people today, a day after a US general warned that the insurgents may be planning “spectacular” attacks to scare voters in the three weeks before Iraq’s landmark elections.

Meanwhile, Shiite and Sunni religious leaders are sharply divided on whether the vote should be held.

Air Force Brig. Gen. Erv Lessel, deputy chief of staff for strategic communications in Iraq, said yesterday the USA has no intelligence indicating specific plots, but that American leaders expected a rise in attacks. He said that the insurgents’ biggest weapon was their ability to instill fear. “I think a worst case is where they have a series of horrific attacks that cause mass casualties in some spectacular fashion in the days leading up to the elections,” he said.

In Washington, President Mr George W Bush

**Blast kills 14**  
IRAQ, Jan. 8. — An explosion at a house south of Mosul killed 14 people and wounded five today, and the owner blamed a US air attack. — AP

expressed optimism about the 30 January elections, saying they will be “an incredibly hopeful experience”. Authorities in Tikrit said today that gunmen abducted a deputy governor of a central Iraqi province and two other senior Iraqi officials as they travelled to a meeting with Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, Iraq’s most prominent Shiite leader to discuss the elections. In Baqouba, insurgents beheaded a translator who was working with the US army after breaking into his house, police said Sunday. An Iraqi policeman was killed as he was leaving his house in Dora. A car blew up today in Mahaweel killing one man.

In Khadraa, gunmen shot dead Abboud Khalaf al-Lahibi, deputy secretary of the National Front for Iraqi tribes — a group representing Iraqi tribes.

# THREAT FROM IRAN

## Nuclear Ambition Heightens Israel's Fears

By SANKAR SEN

One of the winners of America's war against terror in Iraq is Iran. The overthrow of Saddam Hussain has eliminated Iran's main rival in the Persian Gulf region. Though Israel feels relieved that the American invasion of Iraq has removed a bitter enemy, it also feels nervous because Saddam's ouster has strengthened the position of another enemy — Iran, seen by many Israelis as the most obvious and urgent threat to Israel's existence. Israeli defence minister Shaul Mofaz has threatened to take "necessary steps" to prevent Iran from developing nuclear weapons.

Indeed, Iran is making a determined bid to become a nuclear power. Its progress towards becoming a producer of nuclear fuel was confirmed by the report of International Atomic Energy Agency. Two years ago an exiled opposition Iranian group had revealed the scope of Iran's undeclared nuclear programme. Acting on a tip-off, IAEA inspectors have uncovered Iran's nuclear programme and experiments with fuel technology that involves enriching of uranium and making of plutonium.

### Covert research

Iran has carried on covert nuclear research for a long time. In last October after a deal with three members of the European Union — Britain, France and Germany — Iran had agreed to suspend temporarily all uranium enrichment-related activity while inspections continued. It was hoped that Iran would give up its covert nuclear programme. Iran has, however, backtracked. Iran's Parliament has refused to endorse intrusive inspections and threatened to drop out altogether from the nuclear non-proliferation treaty. It has also revoked its earlier undertaking to stop making centrifuge components and refused to suspend work on heavy water reactor suited for producing plutonium. The IAEA chief El-Baradei has revealed that Iran is pursuing programmes to convert uranium ore to gas that could be fed into centrifuge mechanisms to produce enriched uranium. Iran has now been asked by IAEA to stop making its centrifuge components. IAEA has called for full account of Iran's

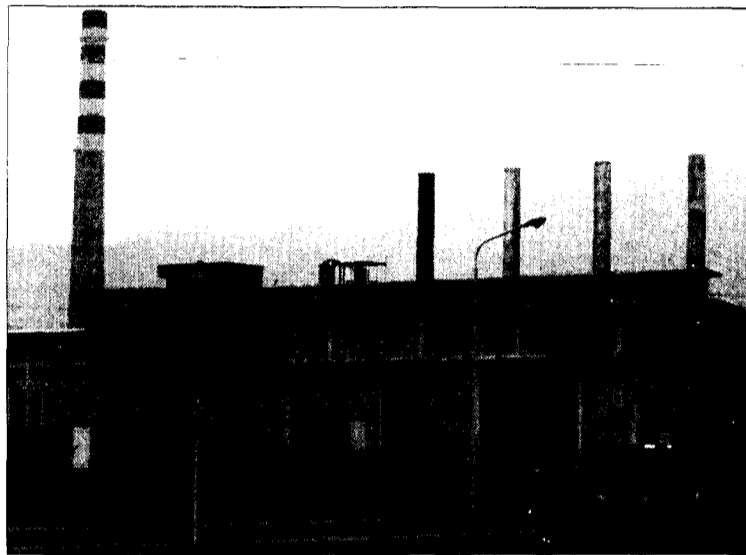
*The author is former director, National Police Academy, former director-general, National Human Rights Commission*

nuclear programme when it meets in November. Iran in turn has threatened to pull out of the nuclear non-proliferation treaty if the IAEA board refers its case to the Security Council and the latter imposes sanctions.

The domestic situation in Iran is also strengthening the hands of ultra conservatives who are not in favour of giving in to

force it to give up its nuclear ambition. The USA also wants Iran to hand over the al-Qaeda operatives in its custody and restrain Iranian supported groups like the Lebanese Hizbullah and Palestinian Islamic jihad, which violently oppose Israel.

Iran's nuclear programme is far more widespread and sophisticated than the single Iraqi



Western pressure. President Khatami has yielded ground to hard-line opponents and supporters of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC). In the last parliamentary election held in February, almost 2,000 reformist candidates were disqualified and the new chamber is now packed with hardliners. Thus it is unlikely that the Iranian Parliament will ratify the protocol which Iran had earlier signed promising suspension of uranium enrichment.

### Revolutionary zeal

Iran's conservative ideologues decry President Khatami's internationalism and also his liberal policies at home. They intend to re-ignite country's old revolutionary zeal. The country's supreme leader Ayatola-al-Khameni has opposed any conciliatory moves towards powers of global arrogance with regard to Iran's pursuit of nuclear technology. The death of the reform movement and the triumph of the conservatives has brought many stifling social restrictions like an Islamic dress code that has that had been relaxed after tolerant Khatami came to power.

America is concerned over Iran's nuclear programme and hopes that Iran's will change tack and sustained pressure will

nuclear reactor that Israeli bombed in 1981. Israel feels that if Iran develops nuclear weapons there will be more tension and higher stakes for Israel's survival. Israel, however, does not want to go it alone against Iran which has sophisticated Sahab missiles that could hit the outskirts of Tel-Aviv. Further, Iran's nuclear installations are scattered and some may be hidden and thus military options against Iran are limited.

There are reasons behind Iran's nuclear ambition. Iran's neighbours — India, Pakistan and Israel — have nuclear weapons and the presence of American troops in Iran is unsettling for Iran. It does not want a massive presence of American troops so close at hand.

Iran's motive may be regional supremacy or technical one-upmanship but it is likely to set off nuclear chain reactions. Soon Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Syria and even Turkey may try to follow suit. India, Pakistan and Israel did not sign the nuclear non-proliferation treaty, but Iran's violations would seriously undermine the treaty, which has somehow kept regional rivalries below the nuclear threshold in many troubled regions.

Another fear haunts Israel. The possibility of an American failure in Iraq may create chaos

and strengthen the influence of al-Qaeda and other terrorist outfits. American success in the democratisation of Iraq will bring the majority rule of the Shiites who are likely to gravitate towards Iran. Ayatula-Ali-Hussain-Sistani, the revered leader of Shiites in Iraq, who is acknowledged as the conscience of the nation with an unique moral authority, also believes that the Shiites can get what they want through the ballot box and the rest of the world has to accept it. He fears that violence will jeopardise the legitimate claims of the Shiites to power. However, the American fear is that in a democratic election if the Shiites come with a thumping majority, they would sideline the Sunnis and the Kurds.

### Lenient attitude

Iran has also suggested that in exchange for its help in cooling Iraq, America should adopt a more lenient attitude towards Iran's nuclear programme. America has not accepted Iran's attempt to link the two issues. America feels that Iran is giving support to Muqtada-al-Sadr, the firebrand Shia leader who has challenged America and the interim Iraqi government of Allawi. US intelligence officials are of the view that Iran is extending covert support to Al-Sadr.

Iran's calculation is that democratic election would give the Shias a predominant voice in the new government because of their numerical supremacy. The Iranians calculate that in the election Shia clerics and their supporters would be victorious and many of them have close links with Iran's theocratic regime. But many pragmatic conservatives of Iran are not in favour of a confrontational path, which may lead to Iran's global isolation. They are interested in a rapprochement with the USA under which America would end economic sanctions against Iran and would also publicly disclaim any intention to destabilise Iran.

Iran on its part would help America in Iraq and Afghanistan and abandon their nuclear plans. However, it will not be easy to work out this kind of understanding. There will be opposition from hardliners in Iran to forgo revolutionary concepts and tone down anti-Americanism. In America also there will be opposition to a policy that rewards Iran for its brinkmanship.

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## Emergency extended in Iraq

*Al* *Feb*  
**Baghdad, Jan. 6** (Reuters): Iraq's US-backed government said today it was extending emergency powers equivalent to martial law for a further 30 days to try to safeguard the January 30 elections under threat from deadly attacks by insurgents.

The state of emergency, first imposed in November ahead of a major US assault on the rebel stronghold of Falluja west of Baghdad, would be ex-

tended into February, Prime Minister Iyad Allawi's government said in a statement.

Emergency powers allow the government to impose curfews, close borders and airports and detain suspects without following normal legal procedures.

The emergency applies to all regions of Iraq except the Kurdish north.

"Since terrorist gangs continue their activities to prevent the creation of a broad representative government and try to impede peaceful political participation of all Iraqis, we have decided to extend the state of emergency in all areas of Iraq except the region of Kurdistan for 30 days," Allawi said.

# Iraq President wants election to be delayed

Guardian News Service  
Baghdad, January 5

IRAQ'S PRESIDENT reignited calls for a delay to the first national elections due in three weeks when he said on Tuesday that escalating violence would make it difficult to hold a proper vote.

The main Sunni party has withdrawn from the election already while other senior Iraqi officials, including the defence minister and the ambassador to the UN, have publicly suggested a delay.

At a meeting of hundreds of Sunni figures at a large mosque in Baghdad yesterday there were further angry calls for a postponement. This combined force is now putting the January 30 poll in jeopardy.

"On a logical basis, there are signs that it will be a tough call to hold the election," the President, Sheikh Ghazi al-Yawar, said. He said the UN should step in and decide whether it was safe to hold the vote as scheduled.

Some in the Iraqi government wanted a delay but did not have the authority to arrange it, he said. Technically, only Iraq's independent election commission has the power to change the date.

"Definitely if a big chunk of the Iraqi population is deprived of participating in elections it will not result in very successful elections," Yawar said.

"This election has a unique role of drafting a constitution. How can you draft a constitution unless all ethnicities, sects, religions and political ideologies are included?"

## Car bomb explosion kills 20 in Baghdad

A CAR bomb exploded outside a police academy south of Baghdad during a graduation ceremony on Wednesday, killing at least 20 people amid a surge in violence ahead of a landmark election. Hours earlier, another car bomb killed two Iraqis in the nation's capital. The bloodshed brought the death toll to more than 90 in the last four days. The explosion outside a gate of the police academy in Hillah was the latest in a string of attacks against Iraqi security forces. It killed at least 20 people and wounded unspecified number.

AP, Baghdad

Nearly all the pressure for a delay is coming from the minority Sunni community, from which the insurgency has emerged in the past two years. Yawar is a moderate Sunni and a respected tribal leader.

Sunni leaders recognise that the violence in their regions and anger at the US occupation will deter their voters and leave the Sunni community perilously under-represented in the new government. Some analysts fear the imbalance could be so serious as to propel Iraq into a civil war.

The Iraqi Islamic party, the largest Sunni party, has put forward a list of candidates but then said it was withdrawing



An American soldier looks at the remains of a car that was destroyed during a bomb explosion in Baghdad on Wednesday.

AFP

from the election. Amar Wajil, the head of the party's political office, yesterday endorsed Yawar's call. "If there is a delay, that will be very good news and will change a lot of things," he said. "We are not against the elections, we just want a delay and we want these calls to come from our brothers the Shia, too."

But Prime Minister Iyad Allawi is under tremendous pressure to ensure the vote goes ahead on time. The pressure comes from the US administration, eager to keep to its already delayed timetable for handing over power, and also from influential Shia religious and political parties, which are certain to

dominate the new government.

Bob Callahan, US embassy spokesman, said: "We expect that there will be elections on January 30 and only on January 30 and that the result of those elections would be recognised and honoured. That's what the law calls for."

Iraq's national security adviser, Mouwaffaq al-Rubaie, said that any delay to the poll would provoke a constitutional crisis because the interim authority's mandate expires at the end of January.

"If we delay it for a week or so, the country will go into blood-bath," he said. "The best insurance policy is to have the elec-

tion on January 30."

Shia clerics and politicians had wanted an election last summer but agreed to put the vote off until this month. Now they are reluctant to accede to another delay, and insist the legitimacy created by an election will help lessen the insurgency.

"The majority of the Iraqi people want the election on time," said Saad Jawad Qandil, head of the political bureau of the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq, one of the leading Shia parties. "We believe we have all this escalation in violence because we have postponed the elections the first time."

There are signs of compro-

mise emerging. Qandil said the Shia parties wanted to include Sunni politicians in the new government, regardless of how small a portion of the vote they won. "The transitional government must be a coalition government," he said.

Last week Iraq's UN ambassador, Samir Sumaidaie, suggested leaving some seats vacant for under-represented provinces and imposing a two- or three-week delay to the election. "The electoral process is subject to an impractically tight schedule," he wrote in the *Washington Post*. "While we must demonstrate commitment to the political process, we must not be enslaved by it."

TANKER BLAST KILLS 10 AT MINISTRY BASE ■ AL-QAIDA CLAIMS HAND

# Baghdad Governor assassinated

Associated Press

BAGHDAD, Jan. 4. — Gunmen assassinated the Governor of Baghdad province and six of his bodyguards today and a suicide tanker truck bomber killed 10 people at an interior ministry commando headquarters in western Baghdad.

Ali al-Haidari's three-vehicle convoy was passing through Baghdad's northern neighbourhood of Hurriyah when unidentified gunmen opened fire, said the chief of his security detail, who asked only to be identified as Maj. Mazen.

Al-Haidari is the highest-ranking Iraqi official killed since the former President of the now defunct Governing Council, Abdel-Zahraa Othman, was assassinated in May.

The Al-Qaida in Iraq, led by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, claimed responsibility for the assassination and the tanker truck explosion, according to a statement posted on the Internet.

A tanker truck packed with explosives detonated near an Interior Ministry commando headquarters in eastern Baghdad, killing 10 people and wounding about 60, the interior ministry said. Eight Iraqi commandos and two civilians were killed, the ministry said.



The cuffed wrists of a suspected Iraqi insurgent held by US Marines in Fallujah on Tuesday. — AFP

## No change in poll plans, says USA

Associated Press

WASHINGTON, Jan. 4. — The White House condemned the assassination of Baghdad's Governor. Ali al-Haidari, and acknowledged "security challenges" in Iraq. It, however, stuck firm to the country's polls schedule.

"We're moving forward to support the Iraqi people as they move to elections at the end of this month," White House spokesman Mr Scott McClellan said. "For much of the country, the situation is secure enough to move forward on holding elections."

In London, Iraq's national security adviser said the country will descend into a bloodbath if elections are not held as planned on 30 January.

Speaking after Al-Haidari's assassination today, Mr Mouwaffaq al-Rubaic told BBC radio that any delay to the poll would provoke a constitutional crisis because the interim authority's mandate expires at the end of January. "If we delay it for a week, the country will go into bloodbath..."

# Baghdad Governor shot dead

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By Atul Aneja

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sial January 30 national elections.

**MANAMA, JAN. 4.** The Governor of Baghdad, Ali al-Haidri, has been killed in a roadside attack in the Iraqi capital, marking the highest-ranking assassination there since May. Gunmen shot at his armour-plated BMW car from several directions as his convoy transited through northern Baghdad.

Mr. Haidri is the most senior



**The Governor of Baghdad, Ali al-Haidri, in a recent TV image. — AP**

Iraqi official to be assassinated in Baghdad since the killing of the head of the Iraqi Governing Council by a suicide bomb in May last year.

At least one of his bodyguards was also killed in the attack, which took place in the Hurriyah neighbourhood, straddling the west bank of the river Tigris. Mr. Haidri had escaped assassination in a roadside bombing in September. There has been a spurt in attacks by the Iraqi resistance ahead of the controver-

Violence also took a heavy toll of lives on Monday, resulting in the killing of 27 persons in Iraq. A bomb went off outside the headquarters of the interim Prime Minister, Iyad Allawi's Iraqi National Accord party, killing four persons and injuring 24.

Another explosion rocked an area outside the Green Zone that houses government offices and the U.S. embassy. In Dujail, a car bomber blew up a national guard station, killing seven persons and wounding eight. Another such incident targeted national guardsmen at a checkpoint outside a U.S. military base near Balad.

In Tel Afar, on the route to the Syrian border, a policeman was killed when he approached a headless body that had been booby-trapped with a bomb.

Responding to the rise in guerrilla attacks, Abdullah Shahwani, head of Iraqi intelligence, has estimated that nearly 200,000 men are part of the Iraqi resistance.

The unabated violence also appears to have affected the perception about the coming elections among some senior officials in the Iraqi interim government. The Defence Minister, Hazem Shaalan, has said it might be possible to postpone the elections, if the Sunni Arabs, agreed to participate in the polls at a later date.

THE HINDU

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## UK aid worker killed in Iraq gets peace award

**London:** British aid worker Margaret Hassan, who was taken hostage in Iraq last year and is believed to have been slain by her abductors, was awarded Ireland's most prestigious peace prize.

The Tipperary International peace prize award, previously won by former Presidents Nelson Mandela, Mikhail Gorbachev, and Bill Clinton, will be received by relatives on behalf of Hassan, 59, in April.

"The peace convention salutes the extraordinary life of a Dublin-born aid worker," the Tipperary convention said on Saturday.

"She showed extraordinary courage, tenacity and commitment in her concern for those who were living in the most difficult of circumstances," the statement said.



M Hassan

Hassan, head of Care International's Iraq operations, was seized in Baghdad on October 19 while on her way to work. Al-Jazeera satellite television said on November 16 it had received a video showing the execution of a man shooting a "blind-folded woman, who appears to be Margaret Hassan".

Although her body was never found, British officials say they believe she has been murdered. AFP



# Suicide attack kills 26 in Iraq

**Baghdad, Jan. 2** (Reuters): A suicide car bomb hit a bus carrying Iraqi National Guards today, killing 26 people in the deadliest attack of its kind in nearly four months on Iraqis cooperating with US forces to secure a January 30 election.

Two bombers detonated their four-wheel-drive vehicle packed with explosives outside a US military base north of Baghdad in the Sunni heartland, where loyalty to deposed dictator Saddam Hussein still runs strong.

The blast near Balad, 60 km north of the capital, was the latest of many attacks on Iraq's fledgling security forces in a bloody campaign to scare voters away from the polls.



An election poster in Baghdad reads: 'It's their right to dream of an independent Iraq'. (AFP)

Twenty-five National Guards and one Iraqi civilian were killed and half a dozen people wounded, Iraqi police said.

US and Iraqi officials ushered in the New Year with warnings of an expected spike in pre-election assaults by insurgents trying to drive out US-led forces and topple Iraq's American-backed government.

"Those responsible for this attack ... are trying to prevent democracy in Iraq," said Major Neal O'Brien, a military spokesman in Tikrit. "They will not be successful."

But in a sign that the campaign of intimidation was

having an effect, an election organising committee in the northern Sunni city of Baiji quit en masse after receiving death threats.

Yesterday, the Al Qaida Organisation of Holy War in Iraq led by Jordanian al Qaida ally Abu Musab al-Zarqawi released a video of five Iraqi security men being shot dead in the street.

A statement posted on an Islamist website along with the video vowed that the group would "slaughter" other Iraqis it brands collaborators with foreign occupiers.

Today's attack was the deadliest suicide bombing against Iraqi security services since mid-September, when at least 47 people were killed outside a Baghdad police station.

Guerrillas have killed hundreds of security force members since the US-led invasion in 2003.

Many Iraqis wonder how police and National Guards will be able to protect voters when they can barely protect themselves.

Insurgents assassinated two local government officials for Diyala province, northeast of Baghdad, and an Iraqi police major outside his home in Baghdad yesterday, signalling they would persist with their campaign in the new year.

Zarqawi's group claimed responsibility for one of the deaths, that of Nawfal Abdul-Hussein al-Shimari, head of Diyala's governing council.

In the al Qaida-linked group's video, masked militants lined up five captive National Guardsmen, their hands bound behind their backs, and shot them from behind.

Some passers-by were seen stopping to watch.

"To the families of civil defence forces, the National Guard and the police we tell you to say your final goodbyes to your sons before you send them to us. Our reward to your sons is slaughter," a masked militant said in a statement.

Five men in civilian clothes were found shot dead in Ramadi, capital of restive Anbar province, earlier this week. A note said they were security men killed by guerrilla fighters.