

## Anti-American slogans ring out at pilgrimage

AFP, Karbala

US troops kept their distance Tuesday as hundreds of thousands of Shiite Muslims converged on the Iraqi holy city of Karbala for the climax of a long-suppressed pilgrimage amid growing expressions of anti-American sentiment by some of their religious leaders.

In the capital, hundreds of Shiites demonstrated outside US military headquarters for a second straight day accusing coalition troops of detaining a prominent cleric involved in organizing the pilgrimage.

General Jay Garner, the head of the US civil administration, meanwhile, met Kurdish leader Jalal Talabani as he continued his preparations for post-war reconstruction, as Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld angrily denied press reports that Washington intended to maintain permanent military bases in Iraq.

The anti-US slogans which rang out in Karbala, some 80 kilometres (50

miles) southwest of the capital, were the first expression of anti-Americanism heard by AFP correspondents during the mass pilgrimage, banned throughout the long years of Saddam Hussein's Sunni-dominated regime.

"No America, no Saddam," shouted in English a group of some 30 men from the majority Shiite community as they passed a hotel housing foreign reporters.

"No to America, no to Saddam, no to tyranny," they chanted in Arabic, marching behind black flags.

Slogans such as "Saddam, thug, where are you now?" had previously targeted the toppled president only.

US forces were not present in the city during the pilgrimage, which has drawn hundreds of thousands of faithful from across Iraq to the shrine of Imam Hussein to commemorate the annual mourning of his decapitation in 680 AD by an Umayyad caliph, a pivotal event in Shiite history.

Many pilgrims appeared little

affected by the anti-US rhetoric of some religious leaders as they went on with the rituals, including self-flagellation, banned under Saddam.

Some voiced gratitude to the United States and Britain for having removed the leader that ruled the country with an iron fist since he became president in 1979.

"I say thank you (US President George W.) Bush and thank you (British Prime Minister Tony) Blair," said lawyer Mohsen Abdul Ali Zubeidi in the middle of a debate on post-Saddam Iraq with sheikhs and journalists in a hotel.

But in the capital, hundreds of Shiites complained that a prominent mullah and people travelling with him had been arrested by US forces.

About 400 Shiites gathered outside the makeshift US headquarters in the Palestine Hotel to protest the alleged detention of Sheikh Mohammed Fartusi, although US officials said they had no word of his arrest. No violence was reported.

About 5,000 fist-shaking people turned up at the same spot on Monday to rail against the Americans.

A senior Shiite leader, Sheikh Hussein al-Assad, said they had no idea of Fartusi's whereabouts but issued a warning to US forces occupying the country since the fall of Saddam Hussein nearly two weeks ago.

"We want to tell America, which claims it came here to protect freedom, that if it does not do so, it will have to deal with the Iraqi people," he said.

A statement by protesters Monday vehemently denounced Fartusi's alleged arrest, as well as that of sheikhs Abdul Rahman Shwili and Abdul Rahman Fetlawi and three travelling companions.

It charged that it "recalled the methods of the tyrant Saddam Hussein and his gang," and warned of "serious consequences."

## 'Hidden MiGs set to form new Iraq air force'

AFP, Canberra

The 51 Iraqi fighter jets found last week by Australian troops north of Baghdad are likely to form the nucleus of a new Iraqi air force, defence sources said here Tuesday.

The jets, which were carefully hidden at the Al Asad air base, were mostly old and obsolete MiG21s, but a few were the more recent and still capable MiG25s.

Military experts believe that with much inferior electronics and without full command and control systems, they would have been no match for coalition air forces if they had taken to the sky, which none did.

Defence sources here said one of the jets may find its way to the Australian War Memorial in Canberra, which features among its historical aviation exhibits a World War II Lancaster bomber.

But most were likely to become a major part of the air force of a new, democratic Iraq.

The US-led coalition accept that the new Iraq could not be left militarily naked in a heavily armed region.



PHOTO: AFP

An Iraqi repairs the power line going to the holy city of Karbala on Monday. Hundreds of thousands of Shiite Muslims made their way to this holy city on a long-suppressed pilgrimage, flexing their new-found political muscle. Such a mass outpouring of faith was unthinkable during Saddam Hussein's rule.

## Garner meets Kurdish leader

AFP, Mosul

General Jay Garner held talks with Iraq's two main Kurdish leaders, receiving a warm reception in the northern autonomous region a day after he arrived in Baghdad as the US civilian administrator.

Garner had a working lunch here with Jalal Talabani and Massoud Barzani, leaders respectively of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) and the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) which have ruled northern Iraq since 1991.

Garner, who a day earlier visited a ravaged hospital and broken down utilities in Baghdad, also visited Suleimanyah, about 50 km southeast of here, where he held talks with Talabani and was showered with flower petals by students at the local university.

"What you have done here in the last

12 years is a wonderful start in self-government and what you have done can serve as a model for the rest of Iraq," Garner told the students.

"Iraq is one of the wealthiest countries in the Middle East yet the wealth of Iraq has never been shared," he said.

The 65-year-old retired general deplored what he saw in Baghdad.

"I went to a hospital that had five kidney patients that could be cared for only two hours a day. Then last night I walked into one of Saddam Hussein's palaces and I looked at the grandeur ... and I got sick because none of this was ever shared with the people."

Garner's talks are focused on restarting vital services following the war. He and his team were due to move on later to northern Iraq's main city, Mosul.

He headed first in a C-130 transport plane to Arbil before traveling to Suleimanyah in a helicopter guarded by

special forces with machine guns.

Garner was received by a PUK delegation and was first embraced by the party's "prime minister" Barham Saleh. He was later hosted by PUK officials at a chalet in Dukan overlooking a blue lake and rocky mountains.

The general was last in the north following the 1991 Gulf war, when he helped administer aid for Kurds facing a counter-assault by Saddam Hussein's forces.

He said his visit here "was like returning home," a sentiment shared by Talabani.

"When you retire, come back to Kurdistan ... and we'll prepare a beautiful house for you," Talabani told him.

The university students cheered on Garner, with one holding a sign in English reading: "We trust you in our future."

It was a reception he did not see in

Baghdad, where the United States is facing mounting anger over the lack of basic services and the presence of its troops 13 days after Saddam's regime was routed.

Garner paid a brief visit to the capital's largest hospital, Yarmuk, whose dark and dusty corridors were still littered with broken glass.

Doctors urged US forces to intervene to restore the hospital to full capacity.

"We would like to see the Americans keep their promises as quickly as possible," said Dr. Mohammed Mussawi, a physician in the emergency room.

Garner also visited the Al-Dora power station and a water treatment station as he began the reconstruction process.

But in Suleimanyah, university professor Hiwa Abdullah said he was "very happy" about Garner's visit.

## British MP denies being funded by Saddam

AFP, London

Maverick British Labour MP George Galloway denied Tuesday accusations from the Daily Telegraph newspaper that he received hundreds of thousands of pounds from Saddam Hussein's regime in Iraq.

The Daily Telegraph said Tuesday that a confidential memorandum sent to Saddam by his head of intelligence showed Galloway had asked a secret agent for a greater cut of Iraq's exports under the oil-for-food programme.

According to the right-wing newspaper, the spy chief wrote a letter to Saddam in January 2000 which revealed that Galloway took a slice of oil earnings worth 375,000 pounds (\$85,500 dollars, 539,000 euros) a year.

## Rumsfeld sees no long-term US military presence in Iraq

AFP, Washington

US Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld said Monday there is little likelihood of a long-term US military presence in Iraq and the emergence of a friendly government in Baghdad could be a reason to reduce US forces in the region.

Rumsfeld angrily denounced a New York Times story that said Washington is planning a long-term military relationship with an emerging Iraqi government that would give it access to bases in the country.

"The impression that is left around the world is that we plan to occupy the country, we plan to use their bases over a long period of time, and it's flat false," he said at a Pentagon briefing.

There had been "zero discussion" among top level Bush administration officials about the long-term use of four Iraqi air bases, he said.

The bases -- at the international

airport outside Baghdad, Tallil in the south, H-1 in the west and the Bashur airfield in the Kurdish north -- are now being used for military operations against remnants of the former Iraqi regime and the movement of humanitarian relief supplies, he said.

"The likelihood of it seems to me to be so low that it does not surprise me that it has never been discussed in my presence," he said.

"Why do I say it's low? We've got all kinds of opportunities and options to locate forces. It's not like we need a new place," he said.

The United States plans, however, to hold discussion with other governments in the region about changes in the US military "footprint" in the region, he said, adding that he expected "significant changes."

"I would personally say a friendly Iraq that is not led by a Saddam Hussein would be a reason why we could have

fewer forces in the region, not more, just logically," he said.

The United States has maintained a constant presence of about 23,000 US forces in the region since the 1991 Gulf War, mainly to protect vast oil fields in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait against attack by Iraq but also as a balance against Iran.

With Iraq no longer a threat, the United States can now consider reducing its military presence in Saudi Arabia and elsewhere which has become a lightning rod for internal dissent and a spur to terrorism.

The United States deployed nearly 300,000 forces for the war in Iraq, but has already begun drawing down the fleets of warships and long range bombers that are no longer needed.

How long US ground troops will remain in Iraq will depend "on how this thing ends," Rumsfeld said.



PHOTO: AFP

Iraqi women carry pots and pans on their way to fetch water and food as the afternoon sets in on the outskirts of Baghdad on April 21.

## Search for corpses goes on in Baghdad

AFP, Baghdad

A handful of ill-equipped volunteers from the Iraqi Red Crescent have undertaken the gruesome task of searching for human remains trapped under rubble or in mangled cars following the US assault on Baghdad.

"There are dozens of abandoned bodies in the streets of Baghdad. Recovering them is not an easy task," said Ali Ismail, who counted 21 charred cars on the streets of the capital with their dead occupants still inside.

A group of Red Crescent volunteers was Monday busy trying to pull out the putrid, fly-covered remains of Amar and Ahmad from a car destroyed by an US army tank shell 10 days before.

"Praise the Lord, God is great," they mumbled, through handkerchiefs they

tied over their faces to allay the stench.

There are no doctors in the team and none of the volunteers had gloves, forcing them to wrap pieces of cloth around their hands as they bent bits of twisted metal.

The two slain men's families were huddled around the ripped apart vehicle as the volunteers painstakingly extracted the body parts of their lost relatives.

Two US soldiers watched the scene from a distance.

According to Amar and Ahmad's families, the two men had left their homes to buy food when their car was hit by a tank shell.

Since the wreckage was found by their relatives and the bodies identified, the families had not received US authorisation to retrieve them.

## The new dark age

BEN OKRI, *The Guardian*

We are now at the epicentre of a shift in the history of the world. The war against Iraq has unleashed unsuspected forces. The first signs are twofold. The need of the Americans to protect oil fields, but not hospitals, museums and libraries. This is a catastrophic failure of imagination and a signal absence of a sense of the true values of civilisation. It does not bode well for the future.

The second sign is in the Iraqi people. We ask why have they turned on themselves, looted their own museums, and burnt their priceless National Library. The answer is simple. Some have been dehumanised. They have been broken by sanctions, crushed by tyranny and annihilated by the doctrine of overwhelming force.

The Aztecs never recovered when Hernan Cortez and the conquistadores broke the faith of that ancient civilisation. Persia never recovered after its destruction by Alexander the Great.

The war against Iraq was won in the wrong way. There is a way to win that does not destroy the ancient mythic pathways of a people. And there is a way to win that destroys the meaning and value of their past. The worst way to win is when a defeated people turn on their ancient gods, and tear them down, when a people turn on their past and burn it. And they don't know why and yet they do. If the past had power and value why has it brought us to this, is what their actions say. The past has made us powerless. We need a new kind of power, so that we too can stand proud and with dignity under the sun. In this the war alliance failed them.

It turns out that we didn't believe truly in the values of civilisation either, or else we would have found a wiser way to win. A way in which we all were winners. Now, with the looting of the museums, and the burning of the National Library, with its inestimable manuscripts and books, the whole of humanity is the loser. We have lost great swathes of our past.

This is why more than ever the value of existing museums is raised to the highest pitch. The importance of the work being done at the British Museum is more urgent and luminous than ever. We may well be on the verge of a new dark age, when even the so-called highly civilised nations no longer know what the most enduring things are. And stand by and watch as darkness creeps upon us, unsuspected.

The real war always has been to keep alive the light of civilisation everywhere. It is to keep culture and art at the forefront of our national and international endeavours.

The end of the world begins not with the barbarians at the gate, but with the barbarians at the highest levels of the state. All the states in the world.

We need a new kind of sustained and passionate and enlightened action in the world of the arts and the spirit.

Ben Okri, who grew up during the Nigerian civil war, is the Booker prize-winning author of *The Famished Road*.

## Iraqi intelligence chief tried to contact US

AFP, Washington

Saddam Hussein's intelligence chief tried to arrange a meeting last week between US representatives and the former Iraqi leader, who an opposition official believes was seen about three days ago, ABC News reported Monday.

Leaders of Iraq's prominent Dulayn tribe told the US network that they had made contact with former CIA officer Bob Baer and others to try to arrange some kind of meeting.

"They told me the chief of Iraqi intelligence was seeking to get in touch with the United States and could I do anything about that," said Baer, who now works for ABC News.

Saddam's intelligence chief, General Tahir Jalil Habbush, went on April 11 to the home of the Dulayn tribal chief in

the town of Ar-Ramadi, about 100 km from Baghdad.

He apparently wanted to make arrangements for a meeting, but US warplanes then bombed the home, killing the chief and 17 family members, the network said.

"We don't know who to trust," Dulayn leader Abdullah Hamid said. "We don't trust them anymore."

Tribe members said Habbush got away, and added that they did not know whether Saddam was still alive.

But the opposition Iraqi National Congress told the network that Saddam was believed alive and had been seen about three days ago.

The INC said "it had information that Hussein was seen about three days ago, at a meeting with senior Baath party officials."



PHOTO: AFP

Thousands of fist-shaking Iraqi Shiites stage an angry demonstration in central Baghdad on Monday complaining that a prominent Mullah Sheikh Mohammed Fartusi, was arrested by US forces. There were no reports of violence although the scene was tense when US troops drew their rifles as the protesters pressed against the barbed wire fence in front of the Palestine Hotel in Baghdad.