

Demobilised Iraqi officers threaten suicide attacks

Elimination of Baathists should be done fairly: UN

AFP, Baghdad

A band of Iraqi army officers took to the streets of Baghdad Monday to protest their plight since the dissolution of the army by the US-led administration in Iraq, warning of further protests and even suicide bombings if their situation was not reconciled.

"We demand the speedy establishment of a government, the return of security, the rehabilitation of public institutions and the payment of wages to all soldiers," former general Saheb al-Mussawi said in an address to around 100 former officers in central Baghdad.

"If our demands are not respected, next Monday will mark the date of the break between the Iraqi army and people on one side and the occupiers on the other," he said in reference to US-led coalition troops.

"All soldiers and their families will protest peacefully in Baghdad and other towns on Monday from

10 am (0600 GMT)."

The protesting band of officers carried banners saying "Better to have the throat slit than revenues confiscated. The Iraqi army demands its rights!", and "The Iraqi army is the army of the people and the nation!"

"Death, death so Iraq can live!" they chanted.

Former colonel Ahmed Abdullah told AFP: "If our position is not settled, we threaten to take up arms."

"We are soldiers used to combat and we have volunteers for martyrdom," warned former lieutenant colonel Ziad Khalaf in reference to suicide bombers.

"We will take back by force what we have lost by force," Khalaf said.

The civilian occupation administration headed by Paul Bremer announced Friday that Saddam's former army and vast security apparatus, along with the

defence and information ministries, had all been abolished.

A "non-political" army is to be created in its place.

"Those not enrolled in this new army, what will they do? How will they feed their family?" Abdullah asked.

Ramiro Lopes da Silva, the UN humanitarian coordinator in Iraq, told journalists that the United Nations was drawing up a plan to rehabilitate jobless soldiers.

"We have to come up with something simple to absorb a potential source of destabilisation," da Silva said.

"If not, we reinforce the lawlessness and will raise banditry not only in Baghdad but in rural area," he said.

Da Silva cited as an example the UNDP's Iraq Reconstruction and Employment Programme (IREP), which aims to find work for 250,000 Iraqis in six months.

Meanwhile, the UN humani-

tarian coordinator in Iraq, Ramiro Lopes da Silva, expressed his hope Monday that the rooting out of Baath Party members from public office was done "cleanly and fairly".

"It has to be a clean, clear and fair process," da Silva told journalists in Baghdad.

"What's needed is a fair process. Criminals have to be punished and the others rehabilitated," he said, noting that many civil servants during Saddam Hussein's rule were obliged to become members of the Baath Party.

"Iraq's civil courts could be rehabilitated to judge the criminals," da Silva added.

The UN official also warned of the risk of getting rid of some of the top officials in state institutions who he said were needed to relaunch Iraq's administrative and economic machines.



A woman holds her baby on Sunday who was born a few hours before last week's earthquake in Haouche-Benouali village, near Bordj Menaiel some 70 km east of Algiers, where she lives in her husband's truck. About 4000 people of the village, which was totally destroyed in the quake, are still waiting for help to start their life anew.



Palestinians walk through the rubble of the demolished family house of Palestinian suicide bomber Mujahid al-Jaabari in the West Bank town of Hebron on Monday. Israeli troops demolished the houses in Hebron of Bassem al-Taqruri, who killed seven other people when he blew himself up on a bus on May 18, and al-Jaabari, who detonated the explosives he was wearing moments later in the same East Jerusalem neighbourhood, killing only himself.

Betrayals of cousins, army officials fasten Saddam fall

AFP, Amman

Saddam Hussein was betrayed by three of his cousins, senior military officers, and a former cabinet minister, in moves that allowed the fall of Baghdad, ex-regime officials have told AFP.

According to these former officials Saddam's cousins ordered troops not to fight against the US-led coalition and issued reports saying that the Iraqi leader was dead.

"The head of the Republican Guard Maher Sufian al-Tikriti, who was considered the shadow of Saddam, told the troops not to fight when US forces entered Baghdad on April 8," one of the sources said on condition of anonymity.

"The verbal order was con-

firmed by the head of intelligence, Taher Jalil al-Harbus al-Tikriti, as well as military officer Hussein Rashid al-Tikriti whose son headed the office of Saddam's youngest son Qusayy," the source said.

At the same time a rumour that Saddam was killed in the bombing of the Baghdad neighbourhood of Al-Mansur on April 7 began to spread among government members.

The information was spread by one cabinet minister, the source said, refusing to identify the former official.

"This minister was then evacuated by American troops along with his family and now lives in a European country," the source said.

The three military officers and their families were also evacuated by US troops aboard a military aircraft following the fall of Baghdad, the source said.

The former officials also told AFP that Saddam had visited the Al-Azamiya district in central Baghdad on April 8 with Qusayy.

A videotape broadcast by Abu Dhabi television in April showed Saddam being cheered by a crowd of supporters in Al-Azamiya, but it was reported to have happened on April 9, the day Baghdad fell to US forces.

"During that visit Saddam said he had been betrayed, referring to two US bombardments targeting him," one of the sources said, quoting witnesses present in Al-Azamiya.

No quick fix for Baghdad crime

AFP, Baghdad

The new US policing suprema for Iraq, Bernard Kerik, ruled out any military quick fix for Baghdad's post-war crime wave Monday and said the only answer was to gradually restore confidence in the Iraqi police.

"To add a whole bunch of (US) military personnel is not the solution," the former New York police commissioner told his first press conference since taking up the post of senior adviser to the interior ministry last week.

"The only answer is to identify where the crime is," and concentrate police resources there to apprehend the criminals, he said.

That required Iraqis to respect their own police force, which could only be won back by weeding out

officers guilty of past brutality or corruption, and massive retraining to eliminate abuses which were the norm during the 24 years of Saddam Hussein's rule.

"Policing over the years in Baghdad has been oppressive, that has to change," said Kerik.

"We have to make sure that (policing) complies with international rules and human rights. That was not how it was done in the past.

"We have to make sure that the police understand that the days of torture during interrogation or interview are no longer."

Kerik said there could be no room in the police for those responsible for past abuses although he acknowledged that in the short term "some" might "slip through the cracks."

Iraq, global terrorism dominate assembly of NATO parliamentarians

AFP, Prague

The Iraq crisis and its impact on the North Atlantic Alliance, together with the threat of international terrorism, were set to dominate a spring session of NATO's parliamentary assembly opening here Monday.

NATO Secretary General George Robertson was scheduled to address the gathering of members of the alliance's parliaments.

The plenary session was preceded Sunday by committee sessions.

Robertson was also set to meet Czech President Vaclav Klaus, Prime Minister Vladimir Spidla, Foreign Minister Cyril Svoboda and Defence Minister Jaroslav Tvrdik.

The Czech Republic joined NATO in 1999.

NATO was seriously split by a crisis over Iraq sparked by three anti-war member-states -- France, Germany and Belgium -- over

whether the Alliance should boost NATO member Turkey's defences in preparation for the war.

The NATO assembly links more than 200 lawmakers from the alliance's 19 members together with associated states including Russia, meeting in full session twice yearly.

Meanwhile, presidents of the national parliaments of European Union member states said Sunday that the new European constitutional convention being drawn up ought to strengthen, not diminish, their role.

After a weekend meeting in Athens, representatives of parliaments of the 15 existing member states and the 10 newly-admitted countries argued in a statement "that the participation of national parliaments should not be marginalised."

They said they gave their full support to the work of the convention, headed by former French president Valery Giscard d'Estaing.

ME summit closer after Israeli nod to roadmap

Most Israelis back peace move

AFP, Crawford

Israel's qualified acceptance of a US inspired "roadmap" for peace with the Palestinians has boosted the chances of President George W. Bush holding a peace summit in the region.

The White House hailed Israel's qualified acceptance of the blueprint on Sunday as "an important step forward" and reports said a White House advance party had gone to Egypt and Jordan to prepare a possible summit.

"We look forward to working with all parties in the region to realize the vision of peace which the president laid out," White House spokesman Adam Levine said.

State Department spokeswoman Tara Rigger said the Bush administration welcomed Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's acceptance of the road map.

"The president has affirmed his

determination to move ahead and to make progress toward his June 24 vision using the road map as a practical guide," Rigger said. "We will continue to work closely with both sides throughout implementation of the roadmap."

In his White House speech on June 24, 2002, Bush expressed US commitment to creating an independent Palestinian state living in peace with Israel, and called for sweeping changes in the Palestinian leadership.

Bush said Friday that he would meet with Israeli and Palestinian leaders if it will promote peace.

"If a meeting advances progress toward two states living side-by-side in peace, I will strongly consider such a meeting," Bush said.

Administration officials have told AFP that Bush may meet Sharon and new Palestinian Prime Minister Mahmud Abbas after a summit from June 1-3 in France. Sharm el-Sheikh in Egypt is consid-

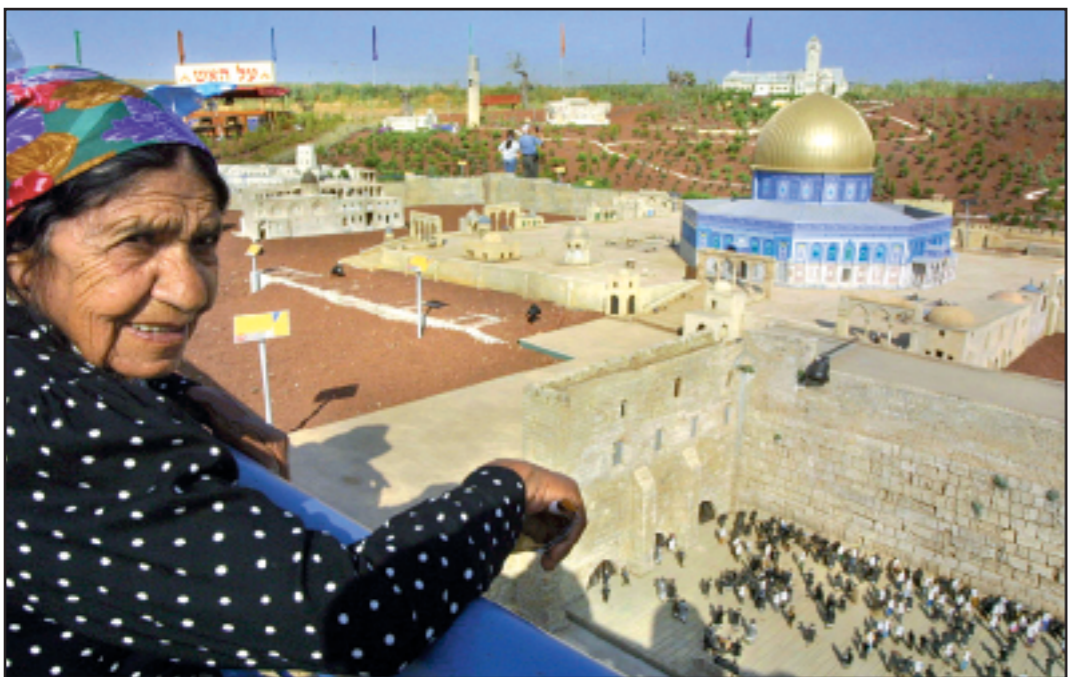
ered the most likely venue.

Media reports said a US team left Washington for Egypt Sunday to prepare for a possible summit between Bush and the Israeli and Palestinian leaders. The White House refused to comment on the reports.

Meanwhile, most Israelis are in favour of the roadmap for peace approved Sunday by their government, but only a bare majority think it will lead to a lasting accord with the Palestinians, an opinion poll published Monday showed.

The poll by the Dahaf institute for the Yediot Aharonot said that of the 500-strong sample questioned, 56 percent were in favour of the international peace plan, compared with 34 percent against and 10 percent undecided.

Some 51 percent believed the roadmap would reach its goal of a lasting peace and a separate Palestinian state by 2005, against 43 percent in doubt.



An elderly woman looks on the models of Jerusalem's Western Wall and the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound, which are part of Mini-Israel, a 13-acre replica in miniature of the Jewish state, in Latrun at the southern edge of the West Bank on May 21. Mini-Israel, situated halfway between Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, is an ambitious 20-million-dollar tourist attraction, which opened its doors in mid-April and since then, has drawn more than 200,000 visitors. In this utopian image of Israel, there is no sign of occupation and the only representation of Palestinians is limited to various sites in the Old City and East Jerusalem, as well as two sites in the southern West Bank, both of which are holy to Jews and Muslims.



Passengers arriving aboard the MV San Nicolas wait to be called at the Philippines coast guard station on Sunday. Two passenger ferries collided in bad weather near the islands of Corrigidor and Limbones, leaving 28 dead and 19 missing while 162 survivors were rescued from the sea in a massive search operation.