

# Powell charts course for Iraqi democracy

## Opposition grows in US amid rising pricetag

AFP, Baghdad

Visiting US Secretary of State Colin Powell outlined Iraq's path to democracy, as other US officials defended Washington's beleaguered Iraq policy and the rapidly rising pricetag for the US-led war on terror.

Another US soldier was killed in an attack west of Baghdad barely an hour before Powell flew in to Iraq via Kuwait from Geneva where emergency UN talks failed to resolve core issues over Iraq's future.

Powell, the highest-ranking US official to visit since Saddam Hussein's ouster in April, hailed progress in rebuilding Iraq but shied away from a 2004 target date floated by interim leaders for elections.

that will come, the writing of a constitution, and from that constitution, the people will be given a chance to express their will," he told reporters Sunday, after a meeting with interim Iraqi foreign minister Hoshiyar Zebari.

"The major new threat are the terrorists who are trying to infiltrate the country for the purpose of destroying this very hopeful process," he said. "We will not allow that to happen."

On the first visit to Iraq by a US secretary of state in half a century, Powell was faced with an occupation force still under daily anti-US attack, taking the toll to 75 American soldiers killed since the May 1 end of major combat operations.

According to a Washington Post-ABC News poll published Sunday, Bush faces growing domestic disap-

approval of his Iraq policies.

Though the US poll found that Bush's overall approval rating remains strong at 58 percent, as does public support for his war on terrorism and homeland security efforts, a majority of 55 percent called the number of US military casualties in Iraq "unacceptable".

But 61 percent still believed the war in Iraq was worth fighting, versus 37 who did not.

Top US officials took to the airwaves later the same day to defend the administration's Iraq policy and the rapidly rising pricetag for the US-led war on terror.

"What's the cost if we don't succeed with respect to our current operation in Iraq? I think that's far higher than getting the job done right here," Vice President Dick Cheney said on NBC

television.

Cheney said the Bush administration was prepared to do whatever it takes to make its Iraq endeavor work.

The administration has asked Congress for 87 billion dollars in new funds to finance the anti-terror campaign and reconstruction in Iraq and Afghanistan next year.

Asked about the need for reinforcements in Iraq, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Richard Myers, told ABC television that "the security picture is not just a matter of troops, it's also the political governance piece, it's also the economic piece."

"They all have to work together to provide security and a way forward for Iraqis," Myers added.



PHOTO: AFP

An Indian family and their home are threatened by rising floodwaters in the Saran District of Bihar, some 50km east of Patna on Sunday. Some 4.2 million people in 19 of Bihar's 38 districts have been marooned by the floods, which have washed away crops worth four million rupees (87,000 US dollars), swamped 15,000 homes and put a question mark over the future of local cattle stocks.

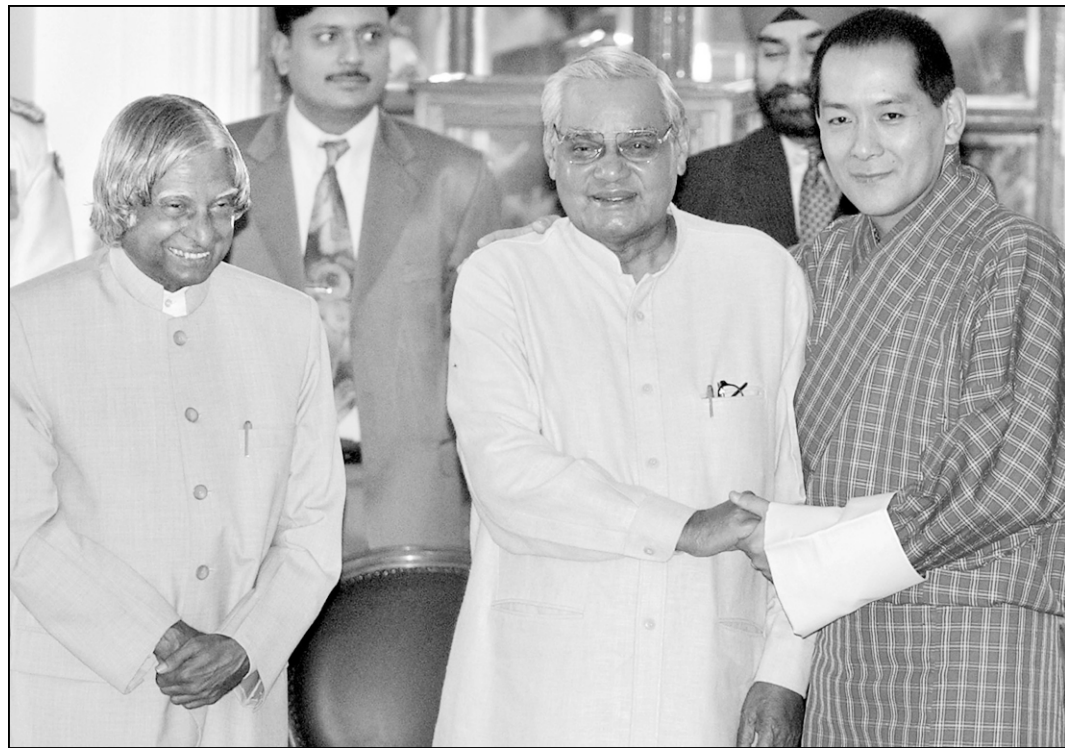


PHOTO: AFP

Bhutan's King Jigme Singye Wangchuk (R) is greeted by Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee (C) as Indian President A.P.J. Abdul Kalam (L) looks on yesterday during a welcoming ceremony at Rashtrapati Bhavan, New Delhi's presidential palace. King Wangchuk is in New Delhi to discuss a range of regional and international issues and to sign an agreement for preparing a detailed project report on an 870-megawatt hydroelectric power project in Bhutan.

## Shots fired at British mission in Iran

REUTERS, Tehran

A motorcycle passenger fired shots at the main gate of the residential compound of the British embassy in Iran, the third time the mission has been targeted this month, a British diplomat said yesterday.

As with the previous incidents, nobody was hurt in the latest shooting which took place Sunday evening, British diplomat Andrew Greenstock told Reuters.

Tensions have been rising between Tehran and London over Britain's arrest at Argentina's request of a former Iranian diplomat in connection with the 1994 bombing of a Jewish community center in Buenos Aires that killed 85 people.

Britain protested "strongly" to Iran last week after the second of two drive-by shootings around the British embassy in central Tehran in under a week.

Witnesses at the sprawling, leafy Gholhak compound where British embassy staff and their families live in northern Tehran, said they heard two shots Sunday night.

## Monsoon rains mount woes of Indian flood-victims

AFP, New Delhi

Four Indian states were yesterday facing intensified flooding with millions already affected, and experts warned swollen rivers in the region are dangerously high after the country's wettest monsoon in 25 years.

India's Central Water Commission warned the swollen Ganges river was rising and threatening several towns and districts in Bihar state, including Munger, Bhagalpur, Kahalgaon and Farakka.

"Many of Bihar's rivers are flowing above the danger level and local reservoirs are filled to their brim," said a senior official from the federal agency that monitors floods.

The meteorological department also warned "medium to heavy rains" were likely to feed the swirling Sone river in Bihar, while there would be light showers in the catchment areas of the other main rivers in the flooded province.

At least 154 people have died and 4.2 million have been affected by flooding in 19 of Bihar's 38 districts, where crops and cattle have also suffered huge losses since the onset of the monsoon in early June.

Water from the Ganges has entered apartment blocks in the state capital Patna and soldiers are supplying relief to those made homeless and rescuing hundreds perched on rooftops across the state.

The Aaj Tak television network said fresh areas in the Chapra district were under water after a reservoir opened its sluice gates as a precaution against a catastrophic breach.

Officials said people who took shelter on top of dam embankments were fleeing as water levels swiftly rose overnight.

The Press Trust of India (PTI) news agency said incessant rains have also pounded the northern state of Uttar Pradesh and added that five more drownings took the flood-related toll there to 148 since

June. All major rivers in the state, including the Ganges, Gandhak, Sharda, Gomati and Yamuna, are flooding, PTI quoted an official statement issued in the provincial capital of Lucknow as saying late Sunday.

Uttar Pradesh's former chief minister Mayawati, who uses only one name, warned Monday that wide swathes of flooded areas were being ignored.

The government has so far not launched rescue and relief operations in flood-affected areas, Mayawati said in an attack on her successor Mulayam Singh Yadav. The weather office also warned of a light cyclonic storm brewing over central Uttar Pradesh and adjoining areas.

PTI reported disruptions in train and road traffic and an Uttar Pradesh spokesman said troops were helping in the flood-hit district of Ballia.

## Pakistan for Saarc observers on both sides of LoC

AFP, Colombo

Pakistan Monday asked India for a "serious suggestion" to jointly combat terror, especially in disputed Kashmir, cautioning New Delhi against mere "point scoring."

Pakistani Foreign Minister Khurshid Mahmood Kasuri said Islamabad was ready to discuss "all issues of concern to India and Pakistan" and wanted New Delhi to agree to go to the negotiating table.

He also called for the presence of a Saarc observer group on both sides of the Line of Control (LoC) in Kashmir to check out allegations of cross border terrorism, human rights violations and state terrorism made by India and Pakistan against each other.

Speaking to the Foreign Correspondents' Association of Sri Lanka here on Monday, the visiting minister denied that he had suggested the presence of an international peace keeping force in Kashmir. He said that Pakistan would accept a Saarc observer group on either side of the LoC.

Kasuri, in Sri Lanka to invite President Chandrika Kumaratunga to a January summit of South Asian leaders, played down Indian Foreign Minister Yashwant Sinha's weekend call to Pakistan to join New Delhi in its battle against "terror."

"If Pakistan can cooperate with the United States with regard to fighting terrorism in Afghanistan, why can't Pakistan cooperate with India in fighting terrorism in India and specially in Jammu and Kashmir," Sinha said in an interview with AFP in New Delhi.

"I can't understand what is holding (us) up. We are ready to cooperate with Pakistan in this fight, even with (President Pervez) Musharraf," Sinha said.

Kasuri told the Foreign Correspondents' Association of Sri Lanka that it was not the first time that India was issuing such calls without doing anything to initiate a dialogue.

"If the foreign minister of India is making a serious suggestion, let's start talking," Kasuri said. "If he (Sinha) is just making a point, that is

not desirable. Point scoring will not get India and Pakistan anywhere."

He said Indo-Pakistan relations had affected the functioning of the seven-member South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (Saarc) whose January summit would be a year overdue because of bilateral bickering.

"We are quite prepared to talk and cooperate with India in all matters. Let's start talking," he said, adding that at the moment "we don't even attend Saarc conferences."

"We have to talk on all issues concerning India and Pakistan."

He repeated a suggestion made last week in Kathmandu that Saarc observers could be posted in Kashmir to verify Indian claims that Pakistan was funneling over Islamic rebels.

"We can't have India in the position of accuser, prosecutor and judge. Let us invite outsiders. They can be Saarc observers," Kasuri said, adding that Pakistan was ready for international "mediation" or "facilitation" over Kashmir.

## 13 convicted for murder of missionary in India

AFP, Bhubaneswar

A court in eastern India yesterday convicted 13 people, including a right-wing Hindu activist, for the 1999 murder of Australian missionary Graham Staines and his two sons, aged eight and 10.

The court in Orissa state's capital Bhubaneswar said the 13 would be sentenced September 22 for the killing that shook India's minority Christian community and triggered global outrage. The 13 could face the death penalty.

The convicted included Ravindra Pal, known by the alias Dara Singh, a right-wing Hindu who allegedly led the mob that lynched Staines and his children on January 23, 1999.

A 14th suspect, Anirudha Dandapat, was acquitted for lack of evidence, Judge Mahendra Nath Pattnaik told the tightly guarded courtroom.

Staines, a 57-year-old Baptist who had worked in India since 1965, was sleeping with his sons in his station wagon as he travelled between villages when he was surrounded by a mob that reportedly shouted anti-Christian slogans.

Staines and his sons Philip, eight, and Timothy, 10, were burnt alive after their escape route from the car was blocked by activists brandishing axes, according to prosecutors.

The missionary's widow Gladys Staines continues to live in India and has publicly forgiven her husband's killers, saying Christianity teaches against bitterness.

She has kept up her late husband's work with lepers and is raising money to build a hospital in Orissa.

Dara Singh was arrested one year after the killing, leading to accusations that authorities had been lax in prosecuting the case.

Singh was allegedly an activist of Bajrang Dal, a right-wing Hindu movement with ideological ties to the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) of Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, who has personally condemned the missionary's killing.

Right-wing Hindu groups accuse the approximately 1,000 registered Christian missionaries in India of trying to alter the country's demographic balance.



PHOTO: AFP

Indian Ravindra Pal alias Dara Singh is surrounded by police officers as he arrives at a special court in Bhubaneswar yesterday.



PHOTO: AFP

Guinea-Bissau regular troops patrol in a street of the capital after General Verissimo Correia Seabra staged a bloodless coup d'etat on Sunday. A new junta, set up under the armed forces chief of staff promised to establish a broad-based transitional government in the former Portuguese colony.

## Guinea-Bissau president ousted in coup

REUTERS, Bissau

Guinea-Bissau's new military rulers said they were holding ousted President Kumba Yalla under house arrest yesterday as they prepared to persuade African ministers that he did not deserve to return to power.

Foreign ministers from five West African nations were due to jet into the impoverished former Portuguese colony for talks with General Verissimo Correia Seabra, who declared himself interim president after Sunday's coup.

The army said Monday that Yalla, who had been held at its headquarters after the pre-dawn putsch, had been placed under house arrest in the capital Bissau.

A military committee set up by the coup leaders to restore democracy said it would meet all political parties, religious leaders and other groups later Monday.

"This meeting will hold consultations for the formation of a transitional government and the creation of a national council of transition," it said in a statement.

## Cinema owners defy rebel ban on Hindi films

AFP, Guwahati

Film distributors and cinema owners in India's troubled northeastern region have decided to defy a ban by separatist rebels on screening Hindi-language movies, officials said yesterday.

"We have decided to continue with our business irrespective of the call by militants not to screen Hindi films in the region," said C.S. Narayan, chairman of the Eastern Indian Motion Pictures Association (EIMPA), which is the top film regulatory body in the region.

At least 11 separatist groups in the northeast recently called for a ban on the screening of Hindi films, which are popularly known as "Bollywood" movies, arguing that "traditional ways" were under threat from increasing western and Indian influences. The ban is supposed to come into effect from November 15 in five of the seven northeastern states, apart from Mizoram, where no rebel groups officially exist, and

Manipur.

In Manipur, which borders Myanmar, a ban has already been in force since 2001, with all cinema hall owners abiding by a rebel order not to screen Hindi films or play recorded Hindi music.

The EIMPA said it would, however, prevent the screening of "obscene and vulgar" Hindi films.

"We will act as a super censor in order to stop distribution of films containing scenes that are vulgar and obscene," Narayan said.

"It is very often seen that vulgar scenes are added to some films even after the Censor Board of India passes those movies."

Bollywood films, with their song and dance sequences and bitter-sweet love sagas, have grown in popularity in the past decade across the northeast, a trend the powerful rebel groups fear will lead the region toward further integration into the Indian mainstream.

The separatists have not banned Western films, which remain popu-

lar in the region, where English is more widely spoken than Hindi, but are costly to bring to cinemas.

"Most of the English films now shown in places like Manipur are more obscene and vulgar than many Hindi movies which is detrimental to the interest of the people in the region," another EIMPA official said.

India's northeastern region, which boasts more than 300 cinemas, has around 35 distributors of Hindi films.

"Our main business comes from Hindi films. Unless we show Hindi movies we are doomed as far as income is concerned," R.N. Nath, a cinema owner, said.

At least 30 rebel groups are active in the northeast with demands ranging from outright secession to greater autonomy.

More than 50,000 people have lost their lives to insurgency in the states since India's independence in 1947.

## 'Iran committed to NPT'

REUTERS, Vienna

Iran's nuclear energy chief said yesterday his country was fully committed to the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), despite weekend hints from Iranian officials that Tehran might leave the global pact.

"Iran is fully committed to its NPT responsibilities," Gholamreza Aghazadeh, head of Iran's Atomic Energy Organisation, told a meeting of member states of the UN International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

He said he would go ahead with talks with the IAEA on signing the so-called Additional Protocol that permits snap short-notice inspections of Iran's nuclear facilities.

"We shall proceed with our negotiations with the agency about the Additional Protocol," he added.

Iran has been under intense pressure to sign the protocol but has yet to do so.

At present, the IAEA's inspectors only have the right to visit declared nuclear sites. The protocol would give them the right to inspect undeclared sites to detect any signs of a secret weapons program.

## Congress to scale up stir for Modi's resignation

PTI, Vadodara

The Congress has decided to intensify its stir for the resignation of Gujarat's Chief Minister Narendra Modi in the wake of Supreme Court's recent indictment of his government over the communal riots last year.

Party leaders from five districts of Gujarat will stage a dharna in the city on Tuesday, Pradesh Congress Committee's president Shankarsinh Vaghela said yesterday.

"Leaders and party workers from Vadodara, Panchmahal, Dohad, Anand and Kaira will stage a day-long dharna demanding resignation of Modi-government, considering the severe observations made by SC against the state," Vaghela said in Vadodara.

The Congress would also submit a memorandum to President APJ Abdul Kalam, demanding that the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government be dismissed and President's Rule be imposed on the state.

## Expansion of UNSC a must: Indian FM

AFP, New Delhi

Foreign Minister Yashwant Sinha has renewed India's longstanding plea for a permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council, seizing on fresh calls by Secretary General Kofi Annan for an overhaul of the world body.

In an interview with AFP days before leaving for the annual meeting of the UN General Assembly in New York, Sinha said India wanted reform not only of international security structures but also of the world economic order.

Advocating "greater democratization" of the system and a "more equitable international order," he said the enlargement of the Security Council should be an "urgent" priority.

"We believe this is an issue which should not be postponed any more," Sinha said. "This is an issue which should be seriously discussed in the UN and a view taken."

The makeup of the five permanent Council members -- Britain, China, France, Russia and the United States -- dates back more than half a century and the idea of expansion has gained currency since the Iraq war.

## Estonians okay EU membership in referendum

AP, Tallinn

Estonians easily approved joining the European Union in a referendum, clearing the way for the tiny former Soviet republic to enter the bloc as a full member next year.

Delighted Estonian leaders said the 67 percent vote in favor of membership marked the dawn of a new age for the Baltic Sea country of 1.4 million people, which has been pulled by force into one power bloc after another for most of the past 800 years. Thirty-three percent opposed EU membership.

"This decision will guarantee the future of Estonia," Kristiina Ojuland, the country's Foreign Minister, told The Associated Press as the victory for EU proponents became apparent.

Estonia, which regained independence amid the 1991 Soviet collapse, is now slated to enter the EU as a full member next year - along with 9 other candidates. It is also scheduled to join the U.S.-led NATO alliance around the same time.