

## Half of US voters want Bush out: Poll

AFP, New York

A rising number of US voters would replace US President George W. Bush in the 2004 elections, a new poll said Saturday, while Bush is in a statistical dead heat with Democratic hopeful Wesley Clark.

Fifty percent of voters would replace Bush, according to the Newsweek poll, up three percentage points from 47 percent in a similar poll conducted September 25-26.

Clark was preferred by 43 percent of registered voters and Bush by 47 percent -- a dead heat in a poll with a three-percentage-point margin of error.

Clark topped the list of Democratic challengers, followed by Joseph Lieberman with 13 percent support, Kerry with 11 percent, Dean with 10 percent and Gephardt with eight percent.

Bush's weak spot, the economy, was a priority for 44 percent of those polled. The president's strong suit, national security, was more important for 16 percent of respondents.

Forty-nine percent disapproved of Bush's handling of Iraq, the highest percentage so far on a Newsweek poll, while 44 percent approved.

Princeton Research Associates conducted the poll among some 1,004 adults on October 9 and 10.

# Thousands mourn Bali bomb victims

Tight security mark bombing commemoration

AFP, Bali

More than 2,000 mourners vowed yesterday at a tearful commemoration not to forget the 202 people from 22 countries who were killed in the Bali nightclub bombings exactly one year ago.

"We haven't forgotten you. We never will," Australian Prime Minister John Howard said of the dead at the tightly guarded multi-faith service on the Indonesian holiday island.

President Megawati Sukarnoputri stayed away. But several hundred other Indonesians including top security minister Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono joined more than 600 Australians and people from numerous other nations in the emotional commemoration under a scorching sun.

Seats were almost full, despite fears of further attacks by the Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) extremist network which authorities say has some links to al-Qaeda.

Australian armed forces chaplains conducted the service. It began with the Australian and Indonesian national anthems in a park beneath towering bougainvillea-clad rocks, not far from the scene of the attacks on Kuta's tourist strip.

Then 22 candles were lit at a small "pool of remembrance" to

symbolise the countries whose nationals died. Australia suffered the worst, with 88 fatalities.

The service included Christian scripture readings and hymns along with Islamic and Hindu prayers to express a united determination to fight terror.

Former Australian consul general in Bali, Ross Tysoe, spent 13 minutes reading out the names of the dead. "May they rest in peace," he said.

Guitarist John Williamson played Waltzing Matilda, Australia's unofficial anthem.

Families of victims and survivors wept and embraced each other as they cast frangipani leaves into the pool of remembrance to end the service.

Howard said the tragedy brought Indonesia and Australia closer together.

"We've also learned that we in this part of the world must make common cause to fight the scourge of terrorism," he said over the hysterical sobs of one mourner.

He said nothing could compensate families for their loss, "but it is a loss that with the passage of time and the support and love of your fellow countrymen and women, can be made perhaps a little easier to bear."

The dead included 38 Indonesians and 22 Britons. JI

staged the attack to avenge what it saw as Western oppression of Muslims worldwide.

Indonesian police, with crucial help from Australian investigators, have caught 34 people and put most of them on trial.

Three have been sentenced to death by firing squad. Others have been given long jail terms.

"Make no mistake: We will hunt them down," Yudhoyono said. "These diabolical men and their brand of evil simply have no place in our society."

Yudhoyono's words gave solace to Simon Quayle, 34, coach of the Kingsley Cats Australian rules football club which lost seven members.

"I thought the Indonesian fella's words were very comforting ... they've done a wonderful job, the Indonesians overall ... they're our brothers now so it's great," he told AFP with an Australian flag draped over his shoulder.

Senior Chaplain Richard Thompson urged mourners not to live as victims.

"If we live as victims then the terrorists have beaten us," he said.

Armed troops were posted on giant rocks overlooking the service and about 2,000 police were deployed in the Kuta area.



Friends and relatives of Bali bombing victims attend the dedication ceremony for the Bali Memorial at Dolphins Point on Sydney's Coogee Beach to mark the first anniversary of the Bali bombings in which 202 people died, including 88 Australians on October 12, 2002. The interlocking bronze sculpture was the work of Australian artist Sasha Reid and signifies family, friends and community bowed in sorrow and remembrance as they embrace and comfort each other.

PHOTO: AFP



PHOTO: AFP

Iraqi Shiite Muslims sleep outside the Imam Hussein shrine in Karbala, 110 km south of Baghdad, late Saturday. Thousands of Iraqis streamed into the holy city of Karbala for a pilgrimage to celebrate the birthday of the 9th century Imam Mehdi and their newfound freedom. The imam, the 12th in the lineage of Ali, a cousin of the Prophet Mohammed (SM), is said to have mysteriously disappeared at the age of five, in 878, near the mausoleum of his forefather Imam Hussein in Karbala. Shiites believe Mehdi will return one day to save the world.

## 1,500 Shiv Senas detained

185 Ayodhya-bound VHP activists held

AFP, Lucknow

Police in the northern Indian pilgrimage town of Ayodhya have arrested some 1,500 hardline Hindu activists for violating a ban on assembling there, officials said.

The activists were campaigning to build a temple over the ruins of a razed mosque, an official said Saturday.

Senior police official Kailash Nath Dwivedi told AFP that activists of the regional Shiv Sena (Army of the god Shiva) party had been banned from organising a convention of the devotees of another Hindu god Ram at Ayodhya.

"The arrests began yesterday (Friday) morning as the Shiv Sainiks were trying to break the ban," he said adding about 1,500 of them had been detained.

Most of the activists from the state of Uttar Pradesh, where Ayodhya is situated, had begun to assemble in Ayodhya on Thursday, Dwivedi said.

Slogans like "Ram, we will come

and construct the temple," rent the air as the police rounded up the Shiv Sainiks, witnesses said.

The Shiv Sena is a major political force in the western state of Maharashtra and is an ally of India's ruling Hindu nationalist BJP party led by Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee.

PTI adds: About 185 VHP activists, including 35 women, were yesterday arrested at Kanpur Central railway station while they were proceeding to Ayodhya, the police said in Kanpur.

The VHP activists, led by Sidheswar Swami of Ram Janam Bhumi Nirman Sanghash Samiti, were travelling from Warrangal by Rapli Sagar Express when they were apprehended by the cops checking all trains leading to Lucknow.

All the arrested persons were taken to Mandi Parishad campu in Nabausta, the police said.

The demolition of the 16th century mosque sparked nationwide riots in which about 2,000 people were killed.

## OIC demands eviction of foreign forces from Iraq

REUTERS, Putrajaya

Muslim nations demanded "eviction of all foreign forces from Iraq" as they began a summit in Malaysia on Saturday, with only Turkey defending plans to deploy its troops alongside the US-led alliance.

They also voiced support for Syria after an Israeli air raid last weekend stoked fears of escalating conflict in the Middle East as Damascus warned it had the right of self-defence.

Abdelouahed Belkeziz, Secretary General of the 57-member Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC), said occupying forces should quickly withdraw from Iraq to give the United Nations a chance to reconstruct the country.

"Foremost of these is the eviction of foreign forces from Iraq, allowing the United Nations to administer Iraqi affairs," Belkeziz said in his opening address.

The OIC Summit, being held in Malaysia's new administrative capital of Putrajaya, began with meetings of senior officials. Foreign ministers will meet on Monday and

the leaders' summit takes place on October 16-17.

Up to 35 heads of state are expected to attend the OIC summit in what will be the largest gathering of Muslim leaders since the attacks on the United States on September 11, 2001.

UN Secretary General Kofi Annan is also scheduled to attend, along with non-members Russian President Vladimir Putin and Philippines President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, who both rule over large, rebellious Muslim minorities.

Belkeziz, a Moroccan, said the summit should address concerns arising from terrorism, globalization and "campaigns against Islam, Muslims and human rights."

He also condemned Israel for what he said was failing to live up to peace process commitments and said the OIC supported the Palestinian and Iraqi peoples and Iranian and Syrian governments against "aggression."

But veteran Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad, hosting the summit before his retirement

on October 31, said the OIC would have little influence as long as US politicians supported Israel.

"We can go to war, but we have no capacity to go to war. That's the problem. We (Muslims) have allowed ourselves to become weak. People bully us," Mahathir told a news conference.

The opposition to the US-led occupation of Iraq left neighboring Turkey isolated.

The lead delegate from Turkey's team of senior officials said although Ankara would have liked a UN mandate to help restore order in neighboring Iraq, it was more important to act.

"We decided to do something. Of course, it is easy for us to stay away, to criticise, to say that the occupation should end," Tahsin Burcuoglu told reporters.

When later asked by Reuters whether troops would definitely not be deployed in the Kurdish north, where Turkey is regarded with deep suspicion, Burcuoglu said: "No. We already have troops there, we will not be sending any more. They will be deployed elsewhere."

## Shiites challenge US authority in Iraq

AFP, Karbala

Shiite Muslims asserted their identity yesterday, taking part in a massive pilgrimage that was banned under Saddam Hussein and challenging US authority in Iraq.

It was the first time in years Iraq's majority community could conduct the annual pilgrimage to the holy city of Karbala, as public demonstrations of the Shiite faith were banned under the regime of Saddam Hussein, a Sunni toppled by US-led troops six months ago.

But while Shiites welcomed the dictator's fall, they have become increasingly vocal in denouncing the US-led occupation of their

country and in criticizing the US-installed interim Governing Council.

In a strong challenge to the cabinet appointed by the 25-member council, firebrand cleric Moqtada Sadr has announced the formation of a rival government that includes a ministry of religious affairs and another responsible for the "promotion of virtue and prevention of vice."

The young cleric, who made the announcement during a sermon at Friday prayers, gave only few details, but one of his spokesmen told AFP Sunday the "alternative cabinet" would be led by Muslims but open to all.

## Indian army chief says al-Qaeda active in Kashmir

AFP, Srinagar

Indian police on Saturday reported nine more deaths in the latest bout of violence in restive Kashmir, where Indian army chief General Nirmal Chandra Vij said operatives of the al-Qaeda terror network were active.

Meanwhile, Indian army chief Vij told reporters during a trip to the restive region Saturday that al-Qaeda was active in the area.

"There is a presence of al-Qaeda militants in Kashmir," Vij told reporters in the state's winter capital Jammu.

It is not the first time Indian officials have made the claim. Last year, Defence Minister George Fernandes also said al-Qaeda was operating in Indian Kashmir.

## Musharraf completes 4 years in power

Rights body raps Pak president

PTI, Islamabad / New York

Checkmated at home by the year-long stalemate over his constitutional powers and pressed hard by the international community to crackdown on foreign and domestic militant groups, Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf completes four years at the helm on Sunday by barely managing to stave off a serious challenge to his rule mounted by political parties.

In contrast to the popularity earlier enjoyed by him in the international community for his commitment to crackdown on al-Qaeda, Taliban and Jihadi groups at home after Sept 11, Musharraf now appears to be coming under increasing pressure from the international community to crackdown on the resurgence of Taliban on the Pak-Afghan borders and Jihadi groups on the Line of Control.

Unlike last year, Pakistan has now been accused of encouraging cross border terrorism both by India and Afghanistan. Also, Musharraf, who had two crucial meetings with US President George W. Bush in less than four months this year faces pressure to send Pakistani troops to Iraq to help the US forces stabilise the volatile political and military situation there.

With domestic public and political opinion firmly opposing, Musharraf is in a quandary on sending troops to Iraq and hopes for a UN or Organisation of Islamic Countries (OIC) resolution to provide some kind of mandate to commit troops.

Meanwhile, criticising the human rights record of four years of Gen. Pervez Musharraf's rule in Pakistan, the Human Rights Watch has demanded the military ruler to stop harassment, torture and blackmail

of political opponents, journalists and former government officials.

In a letter to the Pakistani President on the fourth anniversary of his seizing power in a coup, the US-based human rights watchdog agency charged him with emasculating judiciary and marginalising mainstream Opposition political parties and demanded he immediately restore democracy in the country. The letter also criticised Gen. Musharraf government for the continuing discrimination against women and minorities.

Raising concerns about Pakistan's collaboration with the USA in the "so-called" war on terror, it said the cooperation has been exemplified by a "disregard for due process". "Arbitrary arrests and detentions, allegedly with the support of the US authorities in Pakistan, have taken place with depressing regularity," it added. The last four years have seen the rise in activity by extremist religious groups and an increase in sectarian killing, it said, adding the military government's policy of marginalising political parties is partly to blame for it.

"Opposition legislators have told Human Rights Watch that they have been beaten, harassed and subjected to blackmail for opposing Gen. Musharraf's policies. In Pakistan, the judiciary has been emasculated, political parties rendered powerless, and extremist and sectarian religious parties strengthened under Gen. Musharraf's rule," said Brad Adams, executive director of HRW's Asia Division. "Gen. Musharraf should transfer power to a legitimate government now."

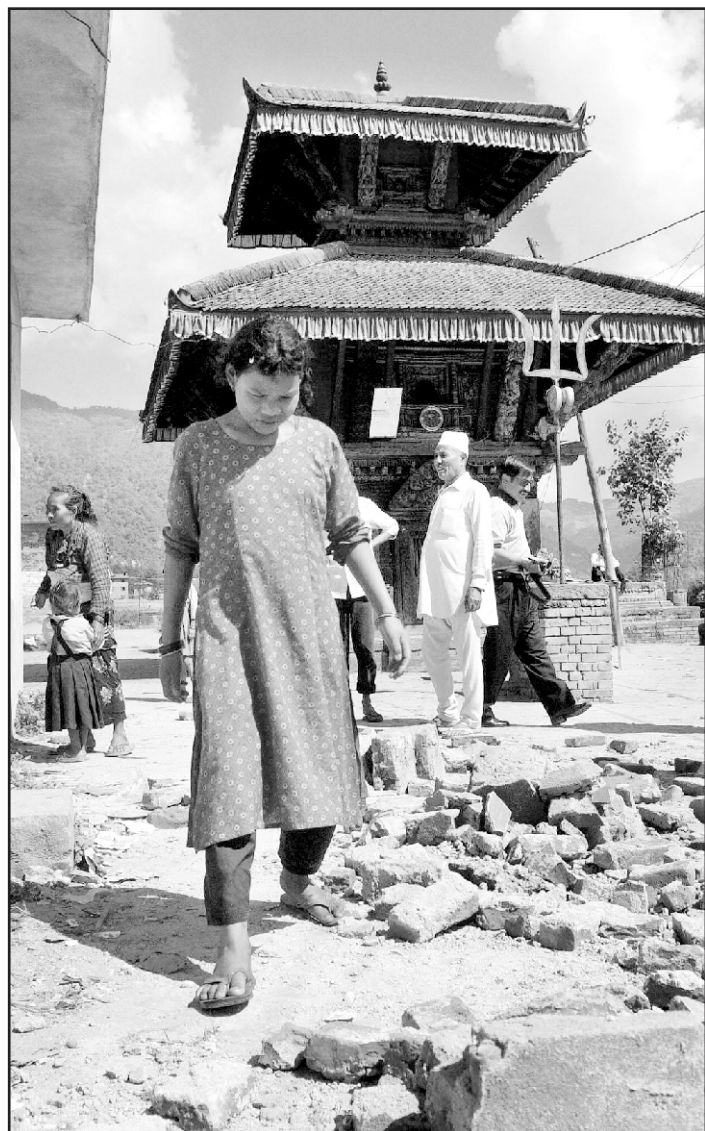


PHOTO: AFP

A Nepalese girl walks through debris caused by a bomb blast at Sankhu some 28 km north east of Kathmandu yesterday. At least 65 Maoist Rebels and four policemen died in a clash at Khas-Kusum in Banke district, Nepal, just some 415 km west of Kathmandu. Police said at least 600 rebels attacked a police post late Friday. The incident was the biggest clash since August 27 when the guerrillas announced they were pulling out of peace talks with the government and a ceasefire which had held since January. Over 8,100 people died in the Maoist insurgency since 1996 as the rebels demand a communist republic for Nepal.

## Taliban inmates tunnel out from Afghan jail

REUTERS, Kandahar

Forty-one Taliban prisoners tunneled out of jail in southern Afghanistan in a dramatic escape that is embarrassing for the government and presents yet another security headache in the troubled region.

The break-out from the main jail in the volatile southern city of Kandahar occurred on Friday night, the city's security chief General Saleem told Reuters. He said all the prisoners were from one barracks of the jail, which houses some 400 prisoners.

"Last night, in the middle of the night, about 40 prisoners escaped through a 30-meter tunnel," he said.

## US troops net 2 members of Saddam's security

REUTERS, Tikrit

US troops hunting A guerrillas raided houses in Saddam Hussein's hometown on Saturday, arresting four men including two who officers said were former members of the fugitive dictator's security force.

In Baghdad, the president of Iraq's US-appointed Governing Council said it was still locked in dispute with Washington over controversial plans to deploy Turkish troops in Iraq.

The Governing Council brushed aside a declaration by a radical Shiite cleric that he was setting up a rival government in Iraq, saying it was an empty gesture.