

## Global poll: Terror threat rose after Iraq war

AFP, London

Most people in 33 out of 35 countries worldwide believe that the US-led war in Iraq has increased the threat of terrorism, a survey for BBC World Service radio suggested yesterday.

An average of 60 percent in the 33 nations agreed that the March 2003 invasion had increased the likelihood of terrorist attacks, with just 12 percent believing the opposite. A further 15 percent thought it had no effect.

The survey of 41,856 people by Canadian pollsters GlobeScan and the US Programme on International Policy Attitudes (PIPA) also claimed there was overall support in 20 countries for US forces to withdraw in the next few months.

But 21 of the 34 countries asked appeared in favour of troops staying in the region until stability is achieved, if the new Iraqi government requested it.

PIPA director Steven Kull said that despite the administration of US President George W. Bush framing the intervention in Iraq as a means of fighting terrorism, "all around the world most people view it as having increased the likelihood of terrorist attacks."

"The near unanimity of this assessment among countries is remarkable in public opinion polling."

Other responses suggested that 21 countries thought the removal of former Iraqi president Saddam Hussein was a mistake; overall, 45 percent were against removing him from power while 36 percent supported the action.



PHOTO: AFP

An Indian army soldier from the bomb squad is watched by a hotel staff yesterday in New Delhi where US President George W. Bush will stay during his India trip. India began a major security drill for US president's visit, calling out commandos and riot police for the world's most powerful man.

## What Bush wants in India?

THE CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR, Washington

President Bush and his policymakers like to stress how much 9/11 has changed America's foreign-policy objectives, but one goal the terror attacks did not alter is to build a stronger partnership with the world's largest democracy, India.

When Bush arrives in India today, he will emphasize that same theme - one he has sounded since he was a governor running for president in 2000. At the top of the agenda are a controversial US-India nuclear-power agreement, proposed last summer when Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh visited Washington; security and economic ties; and India's relations with Pakistan, a country Bush will

visit briefly on Saturday.

But the specific discussion points, while important, fail to convey the broad geopolitical significance of both the trip and of the administration's intent to forge a strategic relationship.

Closer US-India ties are "one of the most significant developments of the early part of the 21st century," says Kurt Campbell, an international security expert at the Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) here.

Others close to the administration's thinking say India exemplifies what the Bush team sees as the future of a peaceful and prosperous world. Thus, they add, India should be encouraged as a partner.

India is "a compelling example of what [the president] thinks can hap-

pen elsewhere," says Michael Green, recent national security director for Asian affairs, pointing to India's established democracy, its "150 million Muslims with no al-Qaeda," and its growing middle class.

US-India relations have seemed to bud before and have suffered "false starts." Now, conditions favour a full bloom, in part because both countries appear to want it, experts say. "What used to be 'estranged democracies' are now 'engaged democracies,'" says Karl Inderfurth, a former assistant secretary of State for South Asian affairs who has accompanied two former presidents - Jimmy Carter and Bill Clinton - to India.

"New Delhi has joined the list of capitals to which a US presidential visit is now imperative," says Inderfurth, now at the Elliott School of International Affairs at George

Washington University.

Bush seeks to cement relations with a huge and fast-growing economy, while at the same time building ties with India as a way to influence the other - but communist - giant in the neighbourhood, China.

India sees a mature relationship with the US as a way to further its status as a world power - including, it hopes, a permanent seat on an expanded United Nations Security Council. India has worked to ease tensions with neighbouring Pakistan - a dangerous nuclear rivalry that escalated to the brink of war in 2002, requiring intense diplomacy from the Bush administration and delaying the grand opening to India the president had hoped for in his first term.

## Thai PM ready to postpone snap polls

AFP, Bangkok

Thai Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra said yesterday that snap April elections could be postponed and indicated he was willing to meet his chief opposition rival in a bid to end spiralling political uncertainty.

His announcement followed assurances from senior military commanders that the armed forces would not stage a coup as pressure mounted on Thaksin to resign.

"Whatever date the election will be held is up to the Election Commission," Thaksin told reporters.

"If the political parties do not want to participate in the election and the date is the condition, I am willing to cooperate," he said in an apparent concession to his opponents.

## 13 killed in Myanmar attack on Naga rebels

AFP, Guwahati

At least 10 soldiers from Myanmar and three Indian separatists were killed and several others from both sides were injured yesterday in fighting inside Myanmar, an India-based rebel leader said.

The fighting between the soldiers and rebels of the separatist National Socialist Council of Nagaland took place in the thick jungles of Myanmar's northern Sagaing Division, the rebel leader said.

More than 300 Myanmar soldiers demolished one of their bases using mortars and heavy weapons, senior

Nagaland separatist leader Kughalo Mulationu told AFP by telephone from the India-Myanmar border.

"Our cadres fled the camp to safer areas and we have sent reinforcements to fight the soldiers," he said. "We are using rocket-propelled grenades to counter the advancing soldiers."

There was no immediate confirmation by authorities in Myanmar.

The rebels are fighting for an independent tribal homeland in India's northeastern state of Nagaland, which borders Myanmar. The militants have at least at least 50 camps with around 7,000 rebels entrenched in fortified bunkers in

Myanmar's thick jungles to evade Indian soldiers.

In December, Myanmar launched a massive military offensive backed by a brigade of around 3,500 government soldiers to evict Indian separatists based in Sagaing.

In an attack last month on rebel bases by Myanmar troops, 15 soldiers and six rebels were killed.

At least four other militant groups from India's northeast, where numerous tribal and ethnic groups are fighting for greater autonomy or independence, have camps in Myanmar.

## CHINA WARNS

## Chen leading Taiwan towards disaster

AFP, Beijing

China warned Taiwan President Chen Shui-bian Tuesday he was leading his island towards disaster and endangering regional peace, after he scrapped an advisory council on unification with the mainland.

"We will never permit Taiwan independence and splittist forces under any name or under any form to separate Taiwan from the motherland," the cabinet-level Taiwan Affairs Office said in a statement.

"Chen Shui-bian's determination to go further down the road of

Taiwan independence, will fully provoke confrontation within Taiwan and across the strait and will only lead Taiwan society a step closer to disaster."

The statement was China's first official reaction to Chen's scrapping of the National Unification Council and guidelines that were set up 15 years ago to work towards an eventual reunification of Taiwan with the mainland.

China has since 1949 viewed Taiwan, an island now with 23 million people off the southeast coast of the mainland, as a rebel province.

## MUSHARRAF SAYS Pakistan doing all it can in terror war

REUTERS, Washington

Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf said on Monday his country was doing all it could in the US-led war against terrorism and offered to fence and mine its border with Afghanistan to stem Taliban infiltration.

"I have been telling Karzai and the United States, 'Let us fence the border and let us mine it.' Today I say it again. Let us mine their entire border. Let us fence it. It's not difficult," Musharraf said, referring to Afghan President Hamid Karzai.

Speaking in an ABC News interview days before a planned visit to Pakistan by US President George W. Bush, Musharraf rejected as "a misperception" criticism that he was not aggressive enough in the pursuit of Taliban fugitives or al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden.

"We are not using the army only to track down Osama," Musharraf said. "We are using the army against al-Qaeda and Taliban. Now in the process, if you get word on him, very good. But we are not certainly focusing entirely only on tracking Osama

bin Laden." Asked whether he was doing all that he could do to shut down militant training camps in Pakistan, Musharraf responded: "Eighty thousand troops are operating. That is what I'm doing about it. Four hundred casualties we've suffered. That is what we are doing about it."

During a visit to Pakistan this month, Karzai urged Pakistan to take action against the Taliban leadership, al-Qaeda and other militants who he said launched attacks from sanctuaries on Pakistani soil.

A senior Afghan security official said on Monday that Afghanistan has solid evidence about militant training camps in Pakistan and the presence there of fugitive Taliban leader Mullah Mohammad Omar.

Musharraf conceded that border security was a problem but said he was certain that Omar was not in Pakistan.

"Nobody denies that there is Taliban and al-Qaeda activity here in our border," Musharraf told ABC. But, he said, "certainly Mullah Omar is in Afghanistan."

## Donors ask warring parties to honour Lankan truce deal

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka's main financial backers yesterday urged the island's warring parties to honour renewed commitments to uphold their truce made during talks in Switzerland.

The United States, Japan, the European Union and Norway asked the government and the rebel Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) to build confidence by implementing what was agreed last week.

The quartet known as the co-chairs presided over efforts in June 2003 to raise international support for the island's Norwegian-backed peace initiative.

"The co-chairs stress the importance of the parties implementing these commitments on the ground so as to build confidence and a conducive environment for progressing towards lasting peace for all peoples of Sri Lanka," they said in a statement.

Peace broker Norway managed to get the two parties to talk in

Switzerland to save their truce. It came under renewed pressure following a surge in violence that killed at least 153 people between December and January.

Colombo initially insisted on rewriting the February 2002 truce arranged by Norway. But after the Tigers resisted the move and threatened to walk out, Colombo backed down and agreed to uphold the ceasefire.

Colombo has also agreed to ensure that other militant groups will not be allowed to operate, especially in the island's restive east where the Tigers face attacks from a breakaway faction.

More than 60,000 people have been killed in the ethnic conflict in the past three decades and four previous peace attempts have ended in failure.

Both sides have agreed to stop the killings, at least till their next round of talks in April.



PHOTO: AFP

Iraqis recite verses from the holy Quran inside the bomb damaged mausoleum of the father of toppled Iraqi President Saddam Hussein in the city of Tikrit, north of Baghdad, yesterday. The explosion took place at 6:00 am (0300 GMT) in the Al-Arbaan graveyard where Hussein al-Majid's tomb was built by Saddam.

## Saddam lawyers end boycott of trial

AP, Baghdad

Saddam Hussein's defence lawyers ended their monthlong boycott of his trial, attending proceedings yesterday even though the judge rejected their demands that he step down. Their return gives a boost to a troubled trial.

Saddam and his seven co-defendants entered the court and took their seats silently a rarity since the former Iraqi leader and his half brother Barzan Ibrahim have shouted slogans or argued with the judge at the start of almost every previous session.

Chief judge Raouf Abdel-Rahman opened the session by announcing that the five-judge panel had rejected a defence request that Abdel-Rahman and the chief prosecutor be removed from the trial.

Saddam's chief lawyer Khaled al-Dulaimi said he would appeal and asked that Tuesday's session be halted immediately, a request Abdel-Rahman refused. Al-Dulaimi and his colleague Khamis al-Obeidi left the court to prepare an appeal, but the other six members of the defence team remained.