

## DEFENDANT SAYS Executing plotters against Saddam was legal

AFP, Baghdad

A former Iraqi judge on trial for crimes against humanity said Monday he had sentenced 148 Shia villagers to death after they "confessed" to trying to kill Saddam Hussein under orders from Iran.

Awad Ahmad al-Bander al-Sadun, the former head of Iraq's revolutionary tribunal who is on trial with Saddam and six other defendants over the killing of the 148 inhabitants of Dujaal in the 1980s, said he was acting within the law.

The trial resumed Monday amid new fears of sectarian violence after six car bombs ripped through four market places in Baghdad's Shia district of Sadr City on Sunday, killing at least 46 people and wounding over 200 in Iraq's worst blood-letting so far this year.

# US refuses to talk nuclear energy with Pakistan

AFP, Islamabad

US Energy Secretary Samuel Bodman said he had refused to discuss nuclear energy during talks with Pakistani officials yesterday, and had advised against a proposed gas pipeline linking Iran, Pakistan and India.

Bodman, who arrived 11 days after Washington signed a landmark civilian nuclear energy deal with Pakistan's long-term rival India, met Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz and Foreign Minister Khurshid Kasuri.

The US official said Pakistani officials wanted to talk about nuclear energy but he was not prepared to do so during his current visit.

"We have developed a very wide-ranging and effective sort of dialogue with Pakistan but it does not include

nuclear energy and I did not discuss that during this visit," he told reporters.

"There were expressions made by various members of the government about their desire to talk about nuclear energy, but it was not the subject that I was...or am prepared to deal with."

Pakistan was not offered a similar deal to India during President George W. Bush's visit to both countries even though it has the status of a major US non-Nato ally.

Pakistan also played a key role in combating al-Qaeda militants after the September 11, 2001 attacks on New York and Washington.

Bodman added that he had discussed proposals for three separate gas pipelines from Qatar, Iran and Turkmenistan to Pakistan.

"We are not encouraging that," he said of a planned multi-billion-dollar pipeline stretching from Iran across Pakistan to India.

"Our country has had and continues to have significant problems with Iran. They seem to be building a military arsenal based on nuclear weapons and we are trying to prevent that."

Pakistan foreign ministry spokeswoman Tasnim Aslam insisted that the Pakistani and US delegations had discussed civilian nuclear cooperation.

"This (civilian nuclear technology) is something that we have been discussing about and yes it was discussed and we will continue to take this issue up," Aslam told a weekly briefing.

Aslam said that Bodman invited a

Pakistani delegation to visit Washington for further discussions on energy cooperation.

The Pakistan side briefed the US delegation on the country's energy needs and possible alternative sources including hydroelectric, gas, coal, nuclear and renewables, a joint statement said after the talks.

Bush said after meeting Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf on March 4 that they had discussed nuclear issues and that "Pakistan and India are different countries with different needs and different histories."



US Energy Secretary, Samuel Bodman (L), listens to Pakistani Foreign Minister Khurshid Kasuri (R) at a meeting in Islamabad yesterday. Bodman arrived in Pakistan for talks on a recent US-Indian nuclear deal and a proposed gas pipeline to Iran.

PHOTO: AFP

## Fatah faces US cut off if it joins Hamas govt

REUTERS, Jerusalem

The Bush administration intends to curtail contacts with President Mahmoud Abbas's Fatah faction if it joins a Hamas-led government, Western diplomatic sources said yesterday.

The warning came as senior Fatah officials held talks in Gaza with Hamas over whether to join the government being formed by the Islamic militant group, which beat Fatah in January elections.

Fatah has so far said it has no intention of joining the government unless Hamas, whose charter calls for Israel's destruction, changes its political program, but talks continue.

The US administration is trying to isolate the Islamic militant group following its Jan 25 election victory, hoping to pressure Hamas to renounce violence, abide by interim peace deals and recognise Israel.

Washington is concerned that by bringing in members of a faction publicly committed to a negotiated peace with Israel, Hamas could soften its international image.

In recent meetings, US officials told Abbas and other senior Fatah members that Washington opposed the faction joining the new Hamas government, Palestinian officials said.

"Hamas can't whitewash its cabinet" by bringing in Fatah and

other factions, said a diplomatic source.

The United States has kept alive the possibility of renewing peace efforts through direct talks with Abbas and other Fatah leaders.

But diplomatic sources said those contacts would be curtailed if Fatah joined the government led by Hamas.

Bush administration officials are barred from having direct contacts with members of Hamas, and U.S. law prohibits the United States from providing any support to the group, classified as a terrorist organization by the State Department.

## 'Milosevic took wrong medicine to secure way out of UN court'

AFP, The Hague

Former Yugoslav president Slobodan Milosevic deliberately took a drug that neutralised the effects of his heart medicine, an expert who examined his blood said yesterday as the UN war crimes court here prepared to release his body.

"I am sure he took the medicine himself because he wanted a one-way ticket to Moscow (for treatment)," Dutch toxicologist Donald Uges told AFP, a day after an official autopsy concluded Milosevic died of a heart attack.

"That is why he took rifampicine," a powerful antibiotic used to treat lep-

rosy or tuberculosis that countered the effects of Milosevic's heart medication, said Uges.

Uges, a toxicologist for the University of Groningen here, said he examined Milosevic's blood two weeks ago at the request of the Dutch doctors who wanted to know why his blood pressure was not dropping despite medication.

Sunday's autopsy pinpointed "myocardial infarction" - heart attack - as the immediate cause of death, although a tribunal spokeswoman admitted it was too early to rule out poisoning as claimed by his entourage and the ex-president himself in a letter revealed after his death.

## Iraqi president warns of civil war after bombings

### Death toll rises to 62

REUTERS, Baghdad

Iraq's president pressed political parties yesterday to move faster to form a coalition government after deadly car bombings he said were aimed at inflaming sectarian tensions and triggering civil war.

A government of national unity encompassing Kurds, Shias and Sunnis is widely seen as the best chance to bring stability to the country, but three months after elections political leaders are deadlocked over who should be prime minister.

Blasts ripped through the east

Baghdad stronghold of a major Shia militia on Sunday, killing or wounding 250 people and raising fears of fresh sectarian bloodletting. The US military said on Monday that the death toll had reached 62.

President Jalal Talabani, a Kurd, said the bombings had been designed to "inflame sectarian strife and fan the fires of civil war."

"It is the duty of the political blocs to intensify their efforts to form a government and establish a broad front to achieve security and stability," he said in a statement.

Radical Shia cleric Moqtada al-Sadr said he would not order his

militia to strike Sunni al-Qaeda militants after Sunday's bombings in his Sadr City stronghold.

"I could order the Mehdi Army to root out the terrorists and fundamentalists but this would lead us into civil war and we don't want that," the youthful Sadr told a news conference in the Shia holy city of Najaf.

Police discovered the shot and tortured bodies of four Shias in Sadr City. Next to the bodies was a sign bearing a single word: "Traitors."



PHOTO: AFP

Hamas's prime minister-designate Ismail Haniya gestures during meeting with leaders from Palestinian factions in Gaza City yesterday. Hamas officials resumed talks with the other main Palestinian factions on forming a broad coalition government after the leadership's Fatah movement rejected a first draft programme.

## 28 killed in Chinese coalmine blasts

AFP, Beijing

Twenty-eight miners were killed and another five were trapped after two separate coal mine accidents in China, the government work safety bureau reported yesterday.

Seventeen workers were confirmed dead while five remained trapped after an explosion at a coalmine in northern China's Inner Mongolia region at 4:00 am yesterday, the State Administration of Work Safety said.

Another 12 had been rescued after the blast at the Rongsheng colliery in Otog Banner in the southwest of the region, the government body said.

Rongsheng colliery, a collectively owned village and township enterprise, has an annual production capacity of 30,000 tons and does not possess a safety production license, it said.

It was undergoing technical upgrade when the accident occurred, it said.

Another 11 miners were killed after a gas explosion ripped through the

Gaoping coal mine in the central province of Hunan on Sunday, the agency said.

China's mines are the world's deadliest with around 6,000 miners dying in accidents last year, according to government statistics. Labour rights groups say the actual figure could be as high as 20,000.

The government has sought to improve safety in recent years, but a sharp rise in demand for energy to fuel booming economic growth has led to higher coal prices and a rush to increase production.

Rampant collusion between local officials and mine owners means breaches of safety regulations are often ignored and miners are usually threatened with dismissal if they refuse to work.

Many government officials even own stakes in the lucrative businesses, while others accept bribes from owners when issuing permits and help mines hide death tolls when accidents occur.

## Thailand warns of emergency

AFP, Bangkok

Tens of thousands rallied yesterday calling on Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra to quit, as a security official warned Thailand could declare a state of emergency if violence breaks out and Bangkok's entire police force was mobilised.

By mid-evening police estimated some 30,000 people had streamed into a field near the royal palace for the fifth rally in as many weeks. The demonstrators plan to camp overnight and then march on Thaksin's

office early Tuesday.

Thaksin's supporters, meanwhile, were marching from the countryside to show their strength in the capital, raising fears of violent confrontations.

"If they destroy state property or burn government buildings, we will announce a state of emergency, beginning by imposing a curfew," a senior official at the National Intelligence Agency said of Monday's protest.

"If the situation grows too severe for government officials to control, it

the authorities will be authorised to arrest protest leaders," he said on condition of anonymity.

Thaksin said intelligence reports indicated there would be attempts to incite unrest during Tuesday's march on Government House, and he had told police to exercise restraint.

"I have instructed police not to use their weapons in any event," he told some 100,000 supporters at a campaign rally in the rural north-east.

## Republicans look to a future without Bush

REUTERS, Memphis

Republican contenders for the White House walked a political tightrope at a weekend gathering of party activists - expressing solidarity with President George W. Bush while stressing differences over issues such as deficits and big government.

While praising Bush's leadership, they condemned runaway government spending, rising debt and expanding bureaucracies - which have grown under Bush and added to

a flood of political difficulties that have sent his approval ratings plummeting.

The conference offered a glimpse of the future for a party contemplating life after Bush. With November's congressional election looming and approval ratings skidding for Bush and the Republican-led Congress, attendees said the party had strayed from its core principles of limited government, fiscal responsibility and conservative social values.

## 4 US soldiers killed in Afghan attack

AFP, Kabul

US-led forces have detained 11 suspected militants in connection with a roadside bombing in eastern Afghanistan, which killed four American soldiers, the US military said yesterday.

It said the arrests came during a continued assault by US soldiers against insurgents in the Pech Valley of restive Kunar province, where Sunday's deadly attack took place.

"The coalition's response has resulted in the detention of 11 insurgents believed responsible for the attack," a US military statement said, adding that the hunt was in progress for other rebels.

"Operations to kill or capture other extremists, deny them sanctuary, and restore stability to the area are continuing," it said.