

## Countries warned against sending troops to Iraq

REUTERS, Dubai

Two previously unknown Iraqi groups on Tuesday warned countries against sending troops to Iraq, where US troops are facing daily attacks, Arab television channels said on Tuesday.

"We strongly reject and will resist with weapons any military intervention under the umbrella of the United Nations, the Security Council, NATO, or Islamic and Arab countries," a group calling itself the Iraq Liberation Army said in a statement shown on the Dubai-based al-Arabiya television.

Thirty-two US soldiers have been killed in guerrilla attacks in Iraq since President Bush declared major combat over on May 1.

Troops from Spain, Poland, Ukraine, Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania, Slovakia, the Baltic states and possibly from the Philippines, Thailand, Mongolia and Fiji are likely to be part of the peacekeeping forces in Iraq.

Bangladesh and Pakistan, both

Muslim nations, have also been asked to take part in peacekeeping operations but they have not announced any decision yet and there is considerable domestic opposition to the proposals.

India said on Monday it would not send troops to Iraq without a United Nations mandate, rejecting a request from Washington for help in the war-torn nation.

Qatar-based al-Jazeera television also showed a statement from another Iraqi group -- the "Iraqi National Islamic Resistance: 1920 Revolution Brigades," in reference to Iraq's history fighting British colonial rule -- warning against further foreign intervention.

"It implored Arab and Islamic countries about the seriousness of sending their troops to Iraq," al-Jazeera quoted the statement as saying.

It said that anti-US attacks had forced Washington to seek help from multinational forces and speed up the creation of a Governing Council, which was

launched on Sunday.

A group claiming to be an Iraqi branch of Osama bin Laden's al-Qaeda network claimed responsibility for attacks on US soldiers in an audio tape broadcast on al-Arabiya on Sunday but its rhetoric sounded more typical of Saddam supporters than Islamic militants.

Analysts say there is no shortage of groups with animosity for the Americans, from Baathists, to Arab Sunni, Shiite and Kurdish Islamists, to ordinary people seeking revenge for US treatment of Iraqis, which is seen as heavy-handed.

Meanwhile a previously unknown group, calling itself the Iraqi Jihad Movement, said it would wage attacks against US forces in Iraq, in a statement received here by AFP.

It also paid tribute to Syrians who came to fight the US forces in the three-week war that ousted Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein in April.

It was the second statement

from an unknown Islamist group vowing to attack US soldiers in two days.

On Sunday, a terrorist group claiming links to the al-Qaeda network announced it had carried out attacks on US troops in Iraq and threatened further violence in a taped message broadcast by the Al-Arabiya television station.

The hitherto-unknown Armed Islamic Movement warned it would continue to target American troops and promised to "break their backs".

Earlier, a grenade blew up Monday outside coalition headquarters in central Baghdad, in a bold assault on the symbol of US power in Iraq, two days ahead of the anniversary of Saddam Hussein becoming president.

A car drove up at around 4:40 pm (1240 GMT) and an assailant hurled the grenade, which landed under a black GMC jeep, before speeding away, said Iraqi police captain Mohammed Muayyuz, without reporting casualties.

## Indian refusal to send troops to Iraq irks US

AFP, Washington

India's decision not to send troops to join a stabilization force in Iraq drew a gentle rebuke from the United States on Monday as US officials said they had hoped for a different outcome.

The State Department said the decision would not affect relations between the Washington and New Delhi but made clear that it did not agree with India's position that a specific UN mandate was required for the force.

And officials said privately that they were not happy with the Indian decision which some believe may affect other countries as they consider whether to send troops to participate in the stabilization force.

"It is a decision that each country needs to make on its own depending on its interests and its concerns about the situation in Iraq," State Department spokesman Richard Boucher said.

"Certainly there (are) ample grounds in Resolution 1483 which encourages countries to participate in stabilization," he told reporters, referring to a document approved by UN Security Council after the war.



Four delegates from Pakistan's Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JUI) Islamic party, Maulana Fazlur Rehman (1-L), Hafiz Hussain Ahmed (2-L), Gul Naseeb (2-R) and Qazi Hameedullah, arrive on the Indian side of the Indo-Pakistan border in Wagah on Tuesday. A delegation from Pakistan's radical Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam Islamic party crossed into India at the Wagah border expressing the hope that their week-long visit would improve understanding between the two countries.



An Afghan woman uses a megaphone to shout anti-Pakistan slogans at a demonstration condemning alleged Pakistani incursions into Afghanistan's borders in Kabul on Tuesday. The protesters attending the peaceful demonstration were also calling for democracy and freedom of speech and freedom of the press.

## US, Afghanistan, Pakistan, to talk border tensions

AFP, Kabul

Afghanistan will raise the issue of border violations by Pakistan at a tripartite meeting of US, Afghan and Pakistani officials due in Kabul on Tuesday, a presidential spokesman said Monday.

"Everything will be done in tomorrow's meeting and also from now on actually directly with the government of Pakistan," presidential spokesman Jawid Luddin said.

The three-way commission was established by Pakistan's President Pervez Musharraf and Afghan leader Hamid Karzai to enhance regional stability and address mutual concerns, including activities in the border region.

The inaugural meeting of the commission was held in the Pakistan capital Islamabad on June 17.

"We hope that we will be able to put an end to the problem as a whole and the clashes that take place in the area," he said.

Fact-finding teams sent by the Afghan government to the border regions have concluded that

Pakistani troops infiltrated Afghanistan territory, but only by a few hundred metres, Luddin said.

"There are only two points of infiltration across the border and this information was confirmed by the team that was sent to the border," Luddin said.

"There have been incursions by Pakistani forces in Goshta and Lalpor districts but only a few hundred metres, in one case 600 metres," the presidential spokesman said.

Meanwhile, Pakistan's foreign ministry spokesman Monday denied any border violations by Pakistani forces.

"Pakistan fully respects the Pak-Afghan border," a Pakistan foreign ministry spokesman said in a statement.

"Pakistani troops never crossed the international border and are positioned on their own side."

Tensions between Afghanistan and Pakistan, the main backer of the now-ousted hardline Taliban regime, have increased recently. Last week a mob ransacked Pakistan's Kabul embassy in protest at the border incidents.

## India sends ambassador to Pakistan

AFP, Wagah

India's ambassador designate to Pakistan Shiv Shankar Menon arrived here Tuesday as the two countries move to resume full diplomatic status after an 18-month hiatus in bilateral ties, an official said.

"The Indian High Commissioner (ambassador check) crossed the Wagah border checkpoint into Pakistan 2:40 pm (0940 GMT)," a Pakistani border security official told AFP.

He was received by Pakistani foreign office officials.

"I see my task helping in friendly and constructive relations between India and Pakistan and I look forward to doing this," Menon said during brief talks with reporters at this only land crossing between the rival nuclear neighbours.

Menon, who was formerly his country's ambassador to China, is New Delhi's first high commissioner in Islamabad since India scaled down its diplomatic presence in Pakistan after a deadly attack on its parliament on December 13, 2001.

## Palestinian leaders 'settle differences' as Britain refuses to dump Arafat

AFP, Jerusalem

Yasser Arafat and prime minister Mahmud Abbas here Monday "settled their differences" over negotiations with Israel, as Britain resisted Israeli pressure to abandon the veteran Palestinian leader.

"President Arafat and Mahmud Abbas settled their differences during their meeting by adopting a formula on the ways and means of conducting future negotiations (with Israel) as well as over security matters," a Palestinian official told AFP, requesting anonymity.

The official gave no details of the agreement struck at Arafat's leadership compound in the West Bank town of Ramallah but said it would avoid the appearance of a quarrel between the two men in future.

Abbas' role remained unchanged and he would retain "the prerogatives defined by the Palestinian constitution", the source said after the meeting, convened after extensive efforts by mediators.

It was the first meeting between the pair since Abbas offered to resign from the central committee of Arafat's Fatah movement last week.

The resignation gesture came after Abbas faced charges from fellow Palestinian leaders of being too soft in peace talks with Israel, especially on the issue of Palestinian prisoner releases.

Sharon has accused Arafat of trying to undermine Abbas, who offered to resign last week from the central committee of Arafat's mainstream Fatah movement.

But Sharon's campaign to persuade foreign governments to sever links with Arafat suffered a blow Monday when Britain made clear it would maintain contacts.

Foreign Secretary Jack Straw stressed during talks with Sharon that Britain would continue to deal with Arafat as and when it was judged to be "useful", a British official said.

## Bush lied to Americans, Cong on WMD: Ritter

### 'Annan lacked courage'

AP, United Nations

Former UN weapons inspector Scott Ritter released a new book, accusing President Bush of illegally attacking Iraq and calling for "regime change" in the United States at the next election.

Ritter criticised key figures caught up in the US-led war at Monday's UN news conference. He said Bush lied to the American people and Congress about Iraq's weapons of mass destruction; UN Secretary General Kofi Annan lacked courage; former chief weapons inspector Hans Blix was "a moral and intellectual coward."

Ritter, a former US Marine, was

a weapons inspector in Iraq from 1991 to 1998. He has been a vocal critic of the Bush administration's policy on Iraq.

Ritter said he wrote "Frontier Justice, Weapons of Mass Destruction and the Bushwacking of America" to educate people. The 209-page paperback, published by Context Books, has on its cover a picture of Bush in jeans and a cowboy hat, behind the wheel of a truck.

In the book, Ritter notes that the Bush administration's stated reason for launching the war was to rid Iraq of weapons of mass destruction. The book argues that there is no evidence that Iraq

possesses, produces or concealed nuclear, chemical or biological weapons. Therefore, Ritter argues that "the United States carried out an illegal war of aggression."

Bush, responding Monday to similar charges about the lack of evidence of illegal Iraqi weapons, insisted: "When it's all said and done, the people of the United States and the world will realize that Saddam Hussein had a weapons program."

Ritter said Bush's real goal was to get rid of Saddam Hussein's regime. "What is needed in America is regime change," Ritter writes. "Anything but Bush and (Vice President Dick) Cheney."

## US detachment arrives in Freetown to support military team in Liberia

AFP, Monrovia

A detachment of US troops and helicopters has arrived in the Sierra Leonean capital Freetown in support of a team of American military experts operating in Liberia, a military spokesman here said.

The expert team arrived in the Liberian capital Monrovia last week to evaluate the situation.

Liberia has been embroiled in near constant warfare since the 1990s and the conflict has fuelled a humanitarian crisis across west Africa, where several countries are struggling to feed and house Liberian refugees with their meagre resources.

Spokesman for the US military team in Liberia, Navy Lieutenant-Commander Terrence Dudley, told AFP late Monday that the support detachment had arrived in

Freetown.

"A support detachment has arrived in Freetown over the weekend. There is three helicopters and around 100 troops. They are there to support our team," he said, adding that the troops arrived aboard a C-130 airplane which is now back to Dakar.

"Our mandate is supposed to end at the end of the week," he added.

Two western journalists in Freetown confirmed the presence of the three helicopters and a C-130 transport plane on the tarmac at Freetown airport.

US President George W. Bush indicated Monday he was open to deploying troops for a "limited" role in stabilizing Liberia, but explicitly made President Charles Taylor's departure a precondition.



Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf (L), followed by his wife, Sahba (R), walk down the plane steps Monday upon their arrival at Tunis airport. Pervez Musharraf arrived in Tunisia for a two-day official visit.

## Israeli man dies after Tel Aviv knife attack

AFP, Jerusalem

An Israeli man died of his wounds after an overnight knife attack by a Palestinian near a Tel Aviv bar, a police source said Tuesday.

Two other people were injured in the attack which ended with the assailant being shot in the leg.

The attacker had tried to enter a seaside nightclub. He stabbed a doorman at the Tarabun Club in the neck before fleeing along the promenade.

He then attacked a woman as well as a security guard at a nearby restaurant, who was less seriously injured, the police source said.

According to Israeli public radio, an Israeli lawyer at the scene seized a gun from one of the injured guards, gave chase and shot the Palestinian assailant in the leg.

According to investigators, the Palestinian attacker was a member of the militant Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades, an armed group linked to Yasser Arafat's Fatah movement.

The attack constitutes a violation of a conditional truce announced by Palestinian militant groups last month.

## Earth's astral rendezvous with Mars

AFP, Washington

Earth is speeding toward a rare astral rendezvous with Mars, placing the two as close to each other as possible and giving amateur astronomers an unparalleled view of the Red Planet.

The two planets are racing toward each other at a rate of about 30 kilometers every five seconds, until they are as close as they ever can be on August 27.

The slightly elliptical curve of their orbits causes this rare meeting, which occurs only once every 60,000 years -- meaning Neanderthals were the last people to have such an up-close look at Mars.

More distant, but still close encounters are slightly more common. The most recent of those were in the months of August in 1924, 1845 and 1766.

At their closest, Earth is still 55.7 million kilometers (34.6 million miles) away from Mars. It's a seemingly great distance, but is relatively small considering the vastness of the solar system.

Even now, the Red Planet appears around 11 pm as a bright point with a reddish-orange tint, inside the constellation of

Aquarius.

Amateur telescopes can see Mars in unusual detail, notably the ice cap on its southern pole, which reflects the Sun's light and looks like an enormous white spot.

"I can see the polar ice vividly using my eight-inch (20-centimeter) telescope," said Ron Wayman, an amateur astronomer in Tampa, Florida.

From now through August, Mars will continue to grow brighter. On August 27, only Venus will shine brighter in the night sky.

Exactly how good a view amateurs can get depends on where they're standing, when they're looking, and how powerful their telescopes.

Mars will reach its highest point in the sky around 3 am, making that the best time for viewing.

Astronomers closer to the equator will get better views than their counterparts at more distant latitudes.

The daily newspaper USA Today joked that with Mars, the ancient Roman god of war, so close to Earth, it would be the perfect time a Martian invasion.



Liberians displaced by war, who have sought shelter in Samuel Kanyon Doe stadium in Monrovia, wait Monday for the International Red Cross to begin distributing food and other essentials. "We are distributing 464,480 tonnes of food and household goods -- mats, casseroles, sheets, soap and cloth -- to 32,890 people housed in this stadium" Andre Mermillod from the International Committee of Red Cross (ICRC) said.