

## 'Foreign troops should not stay for years in Iraq'

### France calls for improving draft UN resolution

AFP, London

Iraq expects foreign troops to remain in the country for "months rather than years", Iraqi interim defence minister Ali Allawi said in London yesterday.

"In terms of time for the presence of the international forces to help us establish security and stability, I think it will be a question of months rather than years," Allawi told a joint press conference with British counterpart Geoff Hoon.

"The multinational force, in as much as its presence is needed to maintain security, will need ... to be replaced by indigenous forces, by Iraqi forces," Allawi said.

The Iraqi minister was responding to a question about how long foreign troops might be expected to remain in the country following the handover of sovereignty by the US-

led coalition on June 30.

Allawi and Hoon held talks at the Ministry of Defence in central London ahead of the press conference.

The British minister refused to say whether London would be dispatching extra troops to Iraq ahead of the sovereignty transfer.

"The situation remains exactly as it was, and as I have set out on a number of occasions recently," Hoon told the press conference.

"We keep the requirement for troop levels under constant review, we are in constant contact with our officer commanding on the ground in southern Iraq, and obviously in the light of his request, his judgement of the security situation, we will make appropriate decisions.

"But we have not taken any decisions at this stage to send extra

troops to Iraq."

A series of newspaper reports have said that London is preparing to send as many as 3,000 more troops to Iraq to help ensure stability ahead of June 30.

Britain currently has 7,900 troops occupying oil-rich southern Iraq, based in the city of Basra, and has declined to say as yet whether it will be sending more, possibly to replace departing Spanish personnel.

However the decision to commit further forces to Iraq could prove highly unpopular for the government of Prime Minister Tony Blair, with a newspaper poll saying Tuesday that 86 percent of Britons opposed this.

Meanwhile, the proposed UN resolution on Iraq drawn up by the US and Britain must be improved if it is to ensure a credible handover of

sovereignty to the Iraqi people, French Foreign Minister Michel Barnier said yesterday.

"We want to work on the credibility of this resolution, and for us the real problem is that the transfer of powers and sovereignty must be clear, complete and not artificial," Barnier said after talks with the EU's high representative for foreign policy Javier Solana.

"The proposal which has been tabled is not take-it-or-leave-it. That is not the spirit of the Security Council, nor indeed the spirit of the Americans and the British.

"It is a proposal which must be discussed and improved on a certain number of points touching principally the sincerity, the reality and the credibility of the process of sovereignty transfer," the minister said.

## Iran may have duped US into Iraq war: The Guardian

AFP, London

US officials suspect Iran duped the United States into invading Iraq by slipping bogus intelligence to Ahmed Chalabi's Iraqi National Congress (INC), The Guardian newspaper reported yesterday.

"Some intelligence officials now believe that Iran used the hawks in the Pentagon and the White House to get rid of a hostile neighbour and pave the way for a Shia-ruled Iraq," it said in a front-page dispatch from Washington.

Quoting a US intelligence official, whom it did not name, The Guardian said Chalabi's intelligence chief Ara Karim Habibi had been a paid Iranian agent for several years, "passing intelligence in both directions".

"It's pretty clear that Iranians had us for breakfast, lunch and dinner," it quoted an intelligence source in Washington as saying. "Iranian intelligence has been manipulating the US for several years through Chalabi."



PHOTO: AFP  
An Iraqi father reaches over barbed wire taking his son from an unidentified relative who brought the boy for a brief visit to see him as he takes part in day two of a three day sit-in by families in tents set up outside the Abu Ghraib prison, west of Baghdad, demanding the release of their loved ones yesterday.



PHOTO: AFP  
Senior leader of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI-M) Jyoti Basu, (L) gestures as he speaks with party general secretary Harkishen Singh Surjeet (R) and an unidentified party official (C) during a politburo meeting in Kolkata yesterday. The CPI-M party leaders discuss the offer of the Speaker's post in the newly elected parliament to the veteran MP Somnath Chatterjee.

## Standoff over portfolio allocation resolved

### DMK to get its ministry of choice

AFP, New Delhi

A row over a key cabinet seat in Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's new coalition was resolved yesterday after one of the two parties dropped its demands for the post, an official said.

The southern Tamil regional Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK), which controls 16 parliamentary seats, had sought the newly-created shipping ministry but Singh allotted it to another southern partner, the TRS party, when he announced his cabinet two days ago.

But K. Chandrasekhar Rao, chief of the TRS party, which has five seats in the parliament, said Tuesday he had decided to give up the portfolio to the DMK.

"For the sake of stability of this government, I asked the prime minister to re-allocate this portfolio. I am not after power or position," Rao said.

The shipping, road transport and

highways portfolios have been merged into a single entity, named the shipping ministry.

The DMK, which pressed for three ministerial berths, had said earlier its seven ministers would take up their duties only after the portfolio issue was sorted out.

According to media reports, the DMK also wanted a post in the revenue department and had been pushing Singh to hand it the internal security ministry, against the wishes of the prime minister's Congress party.

"All issues have been resolved by the timely intervention of (Congress leader) Sonia Gandhi," said DMK leader Dayanidhi Maran, the new minister for communication and technology.

"Prime Minister Manmohan Singh will be sending a letter to the president and T.R. Baalu (DMK) will be given the additional portfolio of shipping," he added.

"All portfolios committed to us have been allocated to us."

## New govt for transparency in arms deals, says Pranab

THE STATESMAN/ ANN, New Delhi

Pranab Mukherjee, who took over as Union defence minister Monday, said the Congress-led alliance would strive for "total transparency" in arms deals.

Speaking to reporters today, he said specific charges against the previous NDA government's defence deals would be looked at. He would ensure institutionalisation of transparency for both emergency and regular purchases for the military.

Mukherjee said modernisation or purchase of new weapons and better training were priorities. Funds for strategic purchases would not be allowed to lapse.

"Whatever is required for security of the nation would be made available," he said.

Asked whether his getting the defence portfolio came as a surprise, he said he was not surprised as it was the prerogative of the Prime Minister to allocate portfolios.

## US mulls replacing top general in Iraq

REUTERS, Washington

The Pentagon is considering replacing Army Lt. Gen. Ricardo Sanchez as the top US military officer in Iraq, defence officials said Monday, but denied the Abu Ghraib Iraqi prisoner abuse scandal was the reason.

A senior defence official noted that Sanchez has served in Iraq for 13 months and that Army and Marine Corps division commanders all have rotated out of the country during that period.

When asked if the prisoner abuse scandal, which took place on Sanchez's watch, was the reason for considering a replacement for the general, this official said, "Absolutely not."

Pentagon spokesman Bryan Whitman refused to confirm or deny an ABC News report that Gen. George Casey, vice chief of staff of the Army, would take over as senior US military officer in Iraq.

"If we had something like that to

announce, we would. Any speculation prior to an announcement would be irresponsible," Whitman said.

Sanchez became the top US general in Iraq last June.

Pentagon officials have talked about placing a four-star general as the overall commander in Iraq, in charge of "Multi-National Force Iraq" and responsible for the broad direction of US military operations. Sanchez is a three-star general.

In addition, the Pentagon wants a three-star general to head day-to-day military operations amid a continuing quest to crush the insurgency. As Sanchez's second in command, Lt. Gen. Thomas Metz serves in that capacity.

The senior defence official declined to give a time frame for when Sanchez would be replaced. "He's been there for 13 months. You have to be looking for replacements for these guys," the official said.

## Bush speech on Iraq not honest: US dailies

AFP, Washington

US President George W. Bush's speech late Monday outlining his plan for Iraq failed to admit any failures and fell short of the bold action needed to convince Americans he is on the right path, two leading US dailies concurred yesterday.

Bush's speech would have been good a year ago after the fall of Baghdad, but it has come "after nearly 14 months of policy failures, none of them acknowledged by the president," said The New York Times.

Bush's attempt at convincing an increasingly skeptical American public and Congress was "at least, a beginning ... but it's not clear that (his) rhetoric, or the steps he is planning, are vigorous enough to turn the situation around," said The Washington Post.

"Mr. Bush would be more persuasive if he would acknowledge more honestly what has gone wrong in the past year and how it can be corrected," added the Post.

"It's regrettable that this president is never going to admit any shortcomings, much less failure," said The Times, adding that it was an aspect of Bush's character "that we have to live with."

"But we cannot live without a serious plan for doing more than just getting through the June 30 transition and then muddling along until the November elections in the United States," added the Times editorial.

While applauding the proposed destruction of the Abu Ghraib prison outside Baghdad, the Post said "for US credibility to be repaired with Iraqis and US allies, Mr. Bush must also renounce the policies that led to the abuses."

And regarding his statement that he would send more troops to Iraq if US commanders asked for them, the Post editorial scoldingly noted that Bush "is the commander in chief, he can and should make that urgent and necessary decision himself."

Both dailies agreed that the right path to a stable Iraq is to bring in more international players to oversee the transition and share in providing security.

They also made suggestions that go beyond the draft resolution the United States and Britain have circulated at the UN Security Council, which the Times described as "disappointingly sketchy" on internationalising the military operation in Iraq.

## Congress asks Buddhadeb to talk less on national issues

THE STATESMAN/ ANN, Kolkata

The Congress has urged Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee to speak "as little as possible on national issues" and not to make "irresponsible statements" that might affect the interests of the Congress-led coalition government at the Centre.

At a rally at Shahid Minar Sunday, the chief minister had said without mincing words that the Left was the driving force behind the UPA government. "If we tell them to sit, they'll sit. If we tell them to stand, they'll stand," he said.

PCC general secretary Dr Manas Bhuniya Monday said such statements would affect the interests of the coalition government and would inspire the Opposition led by "communal and fundamentalist forces".

The Left is backing the Congress out of political compulsion, he said. "Bhattacharjee knows this very well but has made such a statement only to boost the morale of his comrades."

Dr Bhuniya requested the chief minister to visit Gopiballapur in West Midnapore, where armed CPI-M cadres allegedly burnt a person to death and looted 40 shops on Saturday.

## 7m refugees lack basic rights: Study

AFP, Washington

More than seven million refugees have been deprived of basic rights guaranteed by the United Nations for more than a decade, a global survey showed Monday.

Making up about two-thirds of the planets 12 million refugees, these so called "warehoused" refugees mostly lack the basic right of freedom of movement and the right to work guaranteed under the UN Refugee Convention, the survey said.

They are languishing in refugee camps or segregated settlements in remote, desolate, and dangerous border areas, according to the World Refugee Survey 2004 conducted by the US Committee for Refugees (USCR).

Some of them were denied access to education "or the right to step into a courtroom and seek justice when they are wronged,"

said the USCR, which launched a campaign Monday to end warehousing of refugees.

These refugees, it said, were subject to aggression, sexual exploitation, and risk of attack and murder by militias and armies.

"Briefly put, condemning people who fled persecution to stagnate in confinement for much of the remainder of their lives is unnecessary, wasteful, hypocritical, counterproductive, unlawful and morally unacceptable," said Survey's editor Merrill Smith.

"We have observed that more and more refugees worldwide are spending longer periods of time in such situations -- to the point that there are currently more than seven million refugees who have been warehoused for 10 years or more," said Gregory Chen, USCR's director of policy analysis and research.



PHOTO: AFP  
Rescue personnel boat down a flooded street Monday in Gurnee, Illinois, USA. Heavy rains have flooded the Des Plaines River which runs through this community north of Chicago.