

Iraq scientist doesn't want to be PM

AP, Baghdad

With only a few days left, the UN-led hunt for candidates to fill the 30 posts in a new interim Iraqi government heated up Wednesday, but a nuclear scientist who had been jailed by Saddam Hussein took himself out of the competition for the top job of prime minister.

Hussain al-Shahrestani had been mentioned in recent days as a candidate for the post of prime minister, the most important job in the transition government to take office June 30.

Special UN envoy Lakhdar Brahimi said in a statement released by his spokesman at the United Nations that there was no doubt "Shahrestani could serve his country well in a number of positions in government."


"Shahrestani, however, has himself clarified that he would prefer to serve his country in other ways," the statement said.

Meanwhile, UN envoy Lakhdar Brahimi, charged with helping form a new Iraqi government, on Wednesday ruled out Hussain Shahrestani, whose name had been leaked by US officials, as prime minister.


"Mr Shahrestani could serve his country well in a number of positions in government. Mr Shahrestani, however, has himself clarified that he would prefer to serve his country in other ways," Brahimi's spokesman said in a statement.

SEEKING INFORMATION ALERT


These individuals are being sought in connection with possible terrorist threats against the United States.




AHMED KHALFAN GHAILANI




FAZUL ABDULLAH MOHAMMED




AMER EL-MAATI




AAFIA SIDDIQUI



ADAM YAHYE GADAHN



ABDERRAOUF JDEY



ADNAN G. EL SHUKRIJUMAH

CONTACT INFORMATION

IF YOU HAVE ANY INFORMATION CONCERNING THESE INDIVIDUALS, PLEASE CONTACT THE LOCAL FBI OFFICE OR THE NEAREST AMERICAN EMBASSY OR CONSULATE.

Seven individuals sought by FBI are seen on a poster displayed during a news conference at the FBI headquarters Wednesday in Washington, DC. Osama bin Laden's al-Qaeda is poised to stage a new strike on the United States, Attorney General John Ashcroft said as authorities launched a public hunt for seven "armed and dangerous" suspects.

Search for terrorists goes on across world

al-Qaeda close to new attack, says Ashcroft

AP, Panama City

Global intelligence and police agencies are on a worldwide hunt for terrorists with ties to places as disparate as Boston, Islamabad, and Panama City, part of a US scramble to head off what officials fear could be a massive attack this summer.

The US Justice Department released a list of seven people wanted for questioning Wednesday after authorities received a stream of credible intelligence reports pointing to a terror attack of Sept. 11 proportions in the United States this summer. US Attorney General John Ashcroft asked American citizens to give any information they can, and foreign governments have been recruited.

Those on the list include a man who grew up on a goat ranch in California before converting to Islam; a Tunisian who obtained Canadian citizenship; a Tanzanian who goes by the names "Foopie," "Fupi" and "Ahmed the Tanzanian"; a Pakistani woman who received a biology degree in Boston; and a native of the

Comoros Republic in the Indian Ocean who is believed to be al-Qaeda's point-man in eastern Africa.

Even Panama, a country known more for its canal than terrorism, has been included in the search. Officials said Wednesday they are trying to track down a man identified as Adnan Gulshair El Shukrijumah, of Saudi Arabia.

Panamanian Security Council Chief Ramiro Jarvis said El Shukrijumah arrived in Panama legally from the United States in April 2001 five months before the Sept. 11 terror attacks and stayed in Panama for 10 days. He also visited Trinidad and Tobago for six days the next month.

"We don't know exactly what he did during his stay and it is important to find out," Jarvis said.

Migration records show El Shukrijumah returned to the United States, Interior Department spokesman David Salayandia said. The last place he was seen, however, was in Panama.

The revelation was one of the few indicators that have tied Latin America to the global terrorism

threat. Officials have long worried that terrorists would use the region to attack the United States, but so far there has been little evidence to support that fear.

Two of the suspects were also from Canada, according to Canadian Deputy Prime Minister Anne McLellan. She said there was no evidence they are currently in the country, but she urged Canadians to report suspicious activity.

"We know that we are not immune to terrorism, and that we must be vigilant," she said.

One of the men, Abderraoof Jdey, a Tunisian who obtained Canadian citizenship in 1995, was among five people who left suicide messages on videotapes recovered in Afghanistan at the home of Mohammed Atef. Atef, reportedly Osama bin Laden's military chief, was killed in a US airstrike in 2001.

Pakistani security officials are also looking for information on Aafia Siddiqui, 32, a Pakistani woman who received a biology degree from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and wrote a doctoral thesis on neurological sciences at

Brandeis University, outside Boston, in 2001.

Authorities say she returned to Pakistan shortly after the Sept. 11 attacks with her husband and three children. Her whereabouts have been a mystery since March 2003, when the FBI issued a global alert for her arrest for possible links to al-Qaeda. The FBI also wants to talk to her husband.

US authorities have not alleged that Siddiqui is a full-fledged member of al-Qaeda, but believe she could be a "fixer" someone with knowledge of the United States who can support and help get things done for other operatives.

A senior Pakistani security official told The Associated Press on Wednesday that the United States had made no new request for Pakistan to find Siddiqui but that one issued last year was still in effect despite turning up nothing at the time. The official said she had gone underground, and it wasn't even known if she was still in Pakistan.

Radical Muslim cleric arrested in Britain

AFP, London

The radical Islamic cleric Abu Hamza al-Masri, known for his fiery sermons to London Muslims, was arrested in the early hours of yesterday following a US request for his extradition, British police said.

The imam, or preacher, was detained at 3:00 am by officers from the Extradition and International Assistance Unit under an extradition warrant issued by the United States, a police spokesman said.

He said Abu Hamza, who used to preach at a mosque in the Finsbury Park neighbourhood of London until he was banned from doing so, was to make a court appearance later in the day.

The spokesman did not say on what grounds the United States was seeking his extradition.

Abu Hamza, who was born in Egypt and acquired British citizenship through marriage, has courted controversy by his sermons calling for jihad, or holy war, against western interests, and notably denouncing the US-led invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan.

In February last year he was stripped of his job as preacher at the Finsbury Park mosque, which was closed down, but he has since been preaching in the street.

Anti-war trio demand full Iraqi sovereignty

Draft UN resolution should be changed

AFP, United Nations

The United States and Britain ran into new Security Council opposition Wednesday over Iraq, with key opponents of the war calling for changes to their draft resolution on the June 30 handover of power.

China, France and Germany led the way in pressing for revisions to the text, with the question of full Iraqi sovereignty and the mandate of US troops who will remain after the handover emerging as significant sticking points.

"It is not yet a good resolution. There is a lot of work to do," said French ambassador Jean-Marc de la Sabliere after the council held a second round of talks on the draft presented Monday.

"What is at stake is so important that having a good resolution this time is of the essence," he said.

Diplomats said they wanted a number of changes to underline that Iraqis would have total control over their destiny when an as-yet unnamed interim government takes over from the US-led occupation on June 30.

The current draft says that the multinational force (MNF) should remain in the country only with the "consent" of Iraqis and with a one-year mandate that could be reviewed at the request of the caretaker government.

"This is not enough," de la Sabliere said, adding that France also wanted concrete language spelling out that Iraqi troops would be free to opt out of any military operations led by US commanders.

"It is important because we want to underline that there is a real transfer of sovereignty," he said.

But John Negroponte, who will wind up his tenure as UN envoy next month to take over as the new US ambassador to Iraq, declined to say the United States was willing to include such language.

"We think that we've put down a very solid resolution in terms of its conveying the exercise of sovereignty," he told reporters after the council held a three-hour meeting on the draft.

"There's just no question that we are going to operate ... with the consent and approval of the authorities in Iraq," Negroponte said. "We don't think this is a resolution that needs to be rewritten."

AFP obtained a three-page Chinese proposal for changes to the text, including shortening the mandate for the multinational force to the end of January, when national elections are scheduled to take place.

China's ambassador Wang Guangya said the council should not vote on the resolution until it hears from the caretaker government now being assembled in Iraq under the direction of UN envoy Lakhdar Brahimi.

"As far as the contents in the present draft, this has to be discussed with those guys who are being selected," Wang said.

Brahimi set himself an end-of-May deadline to forge a consensus on the government so that it would have one month to prepare for the handover, and on Wednesday his

spokesman dismissed speculation that the list was ready.

"Progress is being made, however, and (Brahimi) remains of the view that it needs to be and can be brought to closure very soon," his spokesman said in a statement released here.

De la Sabliere told reporters that there should be a delay of around two weeks between the naming of the government and the Security Council vote, in order to ensure that the government has broad support among Iraqis.

But Negroponte dismissed the suggestion.

"That just gets you up much too close to the time for the actual transfer of sovereignty," he said. "I assume our French colleague wants the resolution passed before the transfer actually takes place."

Meanwhile, UN Security Council nations said Wednesday they wanted to hear from the still unformed Iraqi government before voting on a draft US-British resolution on the transfer of sovereignty in Iraq.

With UN envoy Lakhdar Brahimi still in Baghdad trying to hammer out an Iraqi consensus on a caretaker government to take over power on June 30, several nations said that government would have to have a say on the new resolution.

"As far as the contents in the present draft, this has to be discussed with those guys who are being selected," said ambassador Wang Guangya of China before the council opened a second round of formal talks on the measure.

NY Times admits it was misled by Iraqi defectors

AFP, New York

The New York Times publicly took itself to task Wednesday for its pre-Iraq war coverage, admitting it was taken in by spurious information from Iraqi exiles with their own agenda to oust Saddam Hussein.

"We have found a number of instances of coverage that was not as rigorous as it should have been," said a message from the editors, titled "The Times and Iraq" and printed prominently in Wednesday's newspaper.

The lengthy and unusual mea culpa said that information that seemed controversial in the prelude to war and questionable now, had been "insufficiently qualified" or allowed to stand unchallenged.

"Looking back, we wish we had been more aggressive in re-examining the claims as new evidence emerged -- or failed to emerge."

Although the Times published a number of articles backing the assertions that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction (WMDs), the newspaper's editorial stance was opposed to the invasion of Baghdad.

The articles in question were written by different reporters and about varied subjects, but the Times said most shared a common feature in that they depended in part on information from Iraqi defectors or exiles bent on regime change.

The credibility of these sources has since been called into question, the newspaper acknowledged, citing the example of the current Iraqi Governing Council member Ahmed Chalabi, who had been named as a source in Times' articles stretching back to 1991.



Haitian youths search the ruins of a destroyed home Wednesday in Fond-Verrette, east of Port-au-Prince, following flash-floods caused by torrential rains throughout the tropical region. Rescuers dug into mud-filled homes hoping to find some of the hundreds missing from flash-floods in Haiti and the Dominican Republic as the official death toll rose to 1950.

Sudan govt, rebels sign peace pact

AP, NAIVASHA, Kenya

Sudan's government and rebels signed key agreements on Wednesday, resolving the last remaining issues needed to end Africa's longest-running conflict.

The adversaries signed three protocols on power-sharing and how to administer three disputed areas in central Sudan, wrapping up outstanding issues that had prevented them from reaching a final deal.

All that remains for the government and the rebel Sudan People's Liberation Army to work out are procedural matters to end the 21-year civil war, in which more than 2 million people have died, mostly from war-induced famine.

The peace process taking place in Naivasha, 60 miles northwest of Nairobi, the Kenyan capital, does not include insurgents fighting a separate rebellion in Darfur region of western Sudan.

It could take months to determine whether the diplomatic solution will translate to peace on the ground. The signing of the agreements on Wednesday was delayed for several hours because of last-minute disputes over power-sharing.

A Western diplomat at the talks said US Secretary of State Colin Powell telephoned rebel leader John Garang to discuss the delays.

In Washington, US State Department spokesman Richard Boucher said the signing will trigger a process leading to the establishment of normal relations with Sudan if certain conditions are met.

Boucher said these include the completion of a comprehensive peace agreement to end the southern conflict and an end to the violence in Darfur, where a 15-month rebellion has made more than 1 million people homeless.

Rumsfeld must resign over abuse: Gore

REUTERS, New York

Former US Vice President Al Gore Wednesday demanded Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld and other top Bush administration officials resign for encouraging policies that led to the abuse of Iraqi prisoners and fanned hatred of Americans abroad.

In a highly critical speech lasting more than an hour, Gore labeled the Bush administration's Iraq war plan "incompetent" and called George W. Bush the most dishonest president since Richard Nixon, who resigned the office of the presidency in 1974 following the Watergate scandal.

Gore, who lost the 2000 presidential election to Bush, said Rumsfeld, national security adviser Condoleezza Rice and CIA director George Tenet should resign.

"We simply cannot afford to increase the risk to our country with more blunders by this team," he told a crowded auditorium at New York University in Manhattan.

"They are endangering the lives of our soldiers and sharply increasing the danger faced by American citizens everywhere in the world, including here at home," Gore said.



Former US vice president Al Gore denounces the policies of the administration US President George W. Bush Wednesday at New York University in New York City.

He decried the torture of Iraqis at Abu Ghraib prison and said the abuse shown in pictures made public in recent weeks was "the natural consequence of the Bush administration policy that has dismantled ... America's checks and balances."

Kerry attacks Bush's record on defending homeland

REUTERS, Seattle

Democratic White House challenger John Kerry accused President Bush Wednesday of being more interested in election-year photo opportunities than providing funds to defend against another Sept. 11-type attack.

Kerry used the new concerns this week about a possible attack on the United States before the November election to step up his criticism of Bush, who has hoped to make his war on terror a centerpiece of his reelection campaign.

The Massachusetts senator blamed Bush for inadequately secured ports, chemical plants and nuclear facilities, underfunded fire stations, and cutbacks in a federal program designed to put more police on the street.

"We deserve a president of the United States who doesn't make homeland security a photo opportunity and the rhetoric of a campaign," Kerry told a rainy-day rally of a couple thousand people at the port of Seattle.

"We deserve a president who makes America safer," Kerry declared, drawing sustained applause and cheers.

"We should not be opening firehouses in Baghdad and shutting them in the United States of America," Kerry said.

Kerry admitted the United States could not protect every potential target, but added: "What we can do is protect against catastrophe. What we can do is protect those places that are the most logical places for the largest potential damage."

He complained that Bush, who has repeatedly cut taxes to the delight of fellow conservatives, had failed to provide states and localities the money they needed to do their job.

"We deserve a president who puts American taxpayer dollars where the need is, not just where the ideology wants it to go," Kerry said.

Steve Schmidt, a Bush campaign spokesman, dismissed Kerry's attacks as "baseless and factually inaccurate."

Since 2001, Schmidt said, "President Bush has distributed more than \$13 billion to state and local law enforcement" for anti-terror efforts.

Kerry made the remarks the day before what aides say will be a major address in Seattle on foreign policy, national security and the war in Iraq.

It will follow Bush's national address on Monday when the president sought to assure Americans about his efforts to bring peace and stability to war-torn Iraq, which he has called a front line in the war on terror.