

# Iraq forms polls panel, asks US troops to stay

**REUTERS, Baghdad**  
Iraq named a team yesterday to organise its first free elections in January, the next step in establishing its independence from US military occupation.

The formal selection of the electoral commission came three days after the appointment of an interim government in a process overseen by Washington with UN participation.

The new government told the United Nations it wanted the right to decide on the future presence of US-led forces and other security issues but in general sided with Washington.

The United States is trying to persuade other major powers, including France and Russia, to support a UN mandate to keep US-led troops in Iraq until the country has a fully legitimate, constitutionally elected government -- scheduled for about 18 months time in the current US transition plan.

Foreign Minister Hoshiyar Zebari told the UN Security Council in New York that Baghdad wanted US-led forces to stay, under the terms of a US-British draft resolution on the planned US handover of power to Iraqis on June 30.

Officials in Baghdad said proportional representation would be used to elect an assembly that will oversee the drafting of a new constitution and choose a replacement for the present interim government.

Much of the voting is likely to be along the lines of Iraq's ethnic and religious communities -- notably Shia and Sunni Muslim Arabs and the non-Arab Kurds in the north. The interim government, led by secular Shia Prime Minister Iyad Allawi, already reflects efforts to balance those groups.

"I stress that any premature departure of international troops would lead to chaos and the real possibility of a civil war in Iraq," Zebari said.

The biggest threat to holding elections is violence that has afflicted the country since the US

invasion 15 months ago.

One major seat of conflict, around the Iraqi holy city of Najaf, appears to be calming down.

Shia politicians said after hours of late-night talks in Najaf that militant cleric Moqtada al-Sadr had agreed to fresh measures to shore up a shaky truce and end weeks of fighting across the Shia south with US-led forces.

Friday morning was calm in the area, although Sadr supporters in Baghdad's poor Shia neighborhood of Sadr City burned down a police station and clashed with US troops.

Negotiators in Najaf said Sadr had agreed to withdraw his Mehdi Army fighters from the city within two days as long as US forces also withdrew, and had proposed neutral monitors.

Sadr announced last week he would pull his militiamen from Najaf and the nearby town of Kufa, and in return the US military said it would suspend offensive operations.

# Pope calls for return of Iraq's sovereignty

## Bush visits Vatican

**REUTERS, Vatican City**  
Pope John Paul called for the rapid return of Iraq's sovereignty with UN involvement during a meeting yesterday with President Bush.

"It is the evident desire of everyone that this situation now be normalized as quickly as possible with the active participation of the international community and, in particular, the United Nations organisation, in order to ensure a speedy return of Iraq's sovereignty, in conditions of security for all its people," the 84-year-old pontiff said.

The pope, who strongly opposed the US-led invasion of Iraq last year, met Bush in the Vatican while thousands of armed police lined major roads in Rome and anti-war demonstrators began to gather to protest against the presidential visit.

As Bush arrived at the Vatican, some onlookers behind police cordons applauded while others whistled in disapproval and held up peace banners.

Later the pope, seated next to the

US president, said the recent appointment of a head of state in Iraq and the formation of an interim government were encouraging steps toward a normalisation in that country.

"May a similar hope for peace also be rekindled in the Holy Land and lead to new negotiations, dictated by a sincere and determined commitment to dialogue, between the Government of Israel and the Palestinian Authority," he said.

Speaking with some difficulty in English, the pope, who has Parkinson's disease, said the threat of international terrorism "remains a source of constant concern."

He cited September 11, 2001 -- when suicide hijackers flew jets into the World Trade Center in New York -- as "a dark day in the history of humanity."

In an indirect reference to a scandal over US troops' abuse of Iraqi prisoners, the pope said that "in the past few weeks other deplorable events have come to light which have troubled the civic and religious conscience of all."



**PHOTO: AFP**  
A unidentified Indian official (L) garlands Indian Communist veteran and new India's parliament Speaker, Somnath Chatterjee (R), in New Delhi yesterday. India's parliament elected its first Communist Speaker, who is part of a leftist bloc that gives vital support to the new government.



**PHOTO: AFP**  
A young Chinese boy waves the national flag during a visit to Tiananmen Square in Beijing yesterday as a paramilitary policeman keep a lookout for any signs of protest. China showed no sign of remorse yesterday on the 15th anniversary of the Tiananmen Square massacre.

# No remorse from China as survivors mark Tiananmen massacre

**AFP, Beijing**  
China showed no sign of remorse yesterday on the 15th anniversary of the Tiananmen Square massacre, with the government instead muzzling survivors and their family who privately mourned the hundreds mown down by machine guns.

With the event remaining highly sensitive to the ruling Communist Party, few, if any, commemorations were taking place to mark the day when hundreds, if not thousands, of democracy protesters were killed by Chinese troops.

On the vast square Friday, police vans criss-crossed constantly to maintain order, while on the majestic Chang'an Avenue running past Tiananmen, uniformed People's Armed Police and undercover teams made their presence felt.

All traces of the bullet holes and tanks tracks that scarred the area have long since been erased.

One wheelchair-bound man was seen protesting, wearing a headband with a slogan on it. He managed to unveil and hold up a

# 13 Taliban killed in Afghanistan

**AFP, Kabul**  
Thirteen suspected Taliban were killed in a firefight with US-led coalition and Afghan forces in southern Afghanistan this week, officials said yesterday.

The fight broke out Wednesday on the first day of a joint air and ground operation between coalition and Afghan forces in a district of the southern province of Kandahar, provincial government spokesman Khalid Pashtun said.

Eight suspected Taliban were captured while two troops from the US-led coalition and one Afghan soldier were wounded, Pashtun told AFP by telephone.

More than 100 Afghan soldiers, supported by dozens of US-led coalition troops and helicopters, launched the operation in Mianeshin district, some 140km north of Kandahar.

Afghan forces were still pursuing around 50 suspected militants, Pashtun said.

"The government troops are chasing them (suspected Taliban) into the nearby mountains," he said.

The US-led coalition would not comment on the operation, citing security reasons.

# KL rejects deployment of GIs in Malacca Strait

## Rumsfeld hints at terrorist hunt

**AFP, Kuala Lumpur**  
Malaysia yesterday ruled out the deployment of US Marines in the vital Malacca Strait as Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld said he hoped US forces would be hunting terrorists in Southeast Asia "pretty soon".

Rumsfeld made the remark as he visited marines and sailors aboard the helicopter carrier USS Essex in neighbouring Singapore, which supports the idea of US involvement in protecting the strait that carries a third of world trade.

In Kuala Lumpur, however, Malaysia's Defence Minister Najib Razak -- who was to join Rumsfeld later at a major regional security meeting in Singapore -- told reporters the country was firmly against foreign intervention as its sovereignty was at stake.

"The entry of the United States is still open for Singapore but for Malaysia, we don't agree to the entry of a third nation," he was quoted as saying by the official Bernama news agency.

The Malacca Strait cuts between peninsular Malaysia and

the Indonesian island of Sumatra, with the tiny island of Singapore at the foot of the narrow waterway.

Rumsfeld did not mention the strait specifically in his exchange with the marines in Singapore, but the comment came amid US and Singaporean efforts to improve maritime security, mainly through better intelligence sharing.

About half the world's oil supplies move through the narrow channel on the way to markets in Japan, China and South Korea, making it a tempting target for Islamic militants seeking to destabilize the industrialised world.

Singapore has consistently led warnings that the Malacca and Singapore straits are extremely vulnerable to terrorist attacks, fearing that terrorists may be planning to hijack vessels for a maritime version of September 11.

But the initiative to increase security aroused controversy after the commander of US forces in the Pacific, Admiral Thomas Fargo, suggested in April that one option under consideration was putting marines and special operations forces aboard high speed vessels in the strait.

# Koreas agree to reduce tensions along border

**AFP, Seoul**  
South and North Korea agreed yesterday on a tension-reduction package after high-level talks on preventing border clashes, taking a big step towards detente on the last Cold War frontier.

Analysts said the package of practical measures reflected a thaw between armed forces.

Military generals from the two sides agreed on measures to avoid accidental clashes in the disputed western sea border, said a joint statement issued after overnight marathon talks which began Thursday.

Naval skirmishes in the fishing grounds off the western coast during the May-June crab season have disrupted rapprochement in recent years on the peninsula.

The measures agreed Friday include setting up a telephone hotline, sharing a radio frequency, using joint signaling systems and exchanging information on illicit fishing in the area, starting from June 15.

South and North Korea also agreed to stop propaganda loud-speaker broadcasts and to dismantle propaganda signboards along the 248-kilometer (154-mile) land border by August 15.

The agreements were seen as a big step forward as the two Koreas remain technically in conflict since the 1950-1953 Korean War which ended in a fragile armistice, not a peace treaty.

"Both sides have taken an initial step to reduce military tensions by agreeing to prevent accidental clashes," said Koh Yu-Hwan, a North Korea expert at Dongguk University.

"It is also symbolically of great significance for them to pave the way for regular military talks."

South Korean political parties hailed the agreements.

The accords, "may serve as a bridgehead for further inter-Korean reconciliation and cooperation," the ruling Uri Party said in a statement.

Another round of working-level talks is set to open in the North Korean border city of Kaesong next Thursday to discuss ways of implementing what they have agreed, the South's spokesman Colonel Moon Sung-Mook said.

"The government would turn these talks into a main dialogue channel to discuss measures to ease military tensions and build mutual trust," he said.

# Calls for CIA overhaul mount after Tenet quits

**AFP, Washington**  
Calls for reform at the CIA gathered steam Friday following the surprise resignation of its director George Tenet and deputy director for operations amid mounting criticism over intelligence provided before the Iraq invasion and the September 11 attacks.

Democratic presidential contender John Kerry, who had already called for Tenet to stand down, said "We must reshape our intelligence community for the 21st century and create a new position of 'director of national intelligence' with real control of all intelligence personnel and budgets."

Several leading dailies including The New York Times and The Wall Street Journal on Friday called on President George W. Bush and the US Congress to plan a major reform for the Central Intelligence Agency. The Los Angeles Times recommended greater congressional oversight.

Tenet fought back tears Thursday as he bid farewell to staff at CIA headquarters, saying he was leaving to spend more time with his family.

Bush also insisted that the new blow to his administration -- as he seeks international support in Iraq and campaigns for re-election -- was a resignation prompted by "personal reasons".

Bush announced he had accepted Tenet's resignation at a hastily convened news conference just before he left for a major trip to Europe.

He said Tenet had announced the news at a White House meeting on Wednesday night.

"He told me he was resigning for personal reasons. I told him I'm sorry he's leaving. He's done a superb job on behalf of the American people," said Bush.

# 'Musharraf told Sharif to move out of Kargil'

**ANI, Washington**  
It was President Pervez Musharraf who advised former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif to listen to the US proposal for withdrawing troops from Kargil, a former US General has claimed.

Dispelling the general impression that it was Pakistan's civilian leadership that had sought Washington's help for arranging a respectable withdrawal from Kargil, former US Central Command chief General (retired) Anthony Zinni (1997 to 2000), says in his book Battle Ready that it was Musharraf who convinced Sharif to move the troops out.

Pakistan's civilian leadership was worried about a loss of face that the withdrawal could have caused and to allay their fears President Bill Clinton offered a plan that could have arranged a respectable withdrawal, Zinni says in his book published and released in the US this week.

Zinni said that he was sent as Clinton's special representative to Islamabad to convince the Sharif administration to move out of Kargil.

"Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and his civilian colleagues appeared reluctant to endorse a withdrawal. That got Musharraf's attention, and he encouraged Prime Minister Sharif to hear me out," Zinni writes.

"Sharif was reluctant to withdraw before the meeting with Clinton was announced (again, his problem was maintaining face); but after I insisted, he finally came around and he ordered the withdrawal," he adds.

"He set up a meeting with Clinton in July," says Gen Zinni while explaining how Sharif arrived in Washington for the 1999 meeting with President Clinton that took place on the American Independence Day, July 4.

"In May, Pakistani forces made a deep incursion into an area called Kargil, on the Indian side of the Line of Control. Though there was normally fighting near the Line of Control, the area for a long time has been quite stable."



**PHOTO: AFP**  
Nepalese Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba (L) shakes hands with Indian Foreign Minister Natwar Singh (R) in Kathmandu yesterday. Singh is in Nepal on two-day official visit during which he will meet King Gyanendra and political party leaders.

# Pakistan test fires 'Ghauri' missile

**PTI, Islamabad**  
Pakistan for the second time in a week yesterday "successfully" test fired a nuclear capable missile Ghauri having a range of 1500 km that could hit most Indian cities, but said it was "not to send political signals outside the country".

According to a military statement, President Pervez Musharraf, who witnessed the launch, said, "The test was not intended to send any political signals outside the country but was necessary for validation of technical parameters."

Pakistan this morning (June 4, 2004) carried out second successful test fire of its indigenously developed medium-range surface-to-surface ballistic missile Hatf-5 (Ghauri), which travelled upto 900 kilometres in range meeting all required parameters, the statement said. Pakistan had test fired a Hatf-5 on May 29.

Rejecting that the test would have any impact on the Indo-Pak dialogue process scheduled to begin later this month, officials in the Foreign Ministry said it was not intentional and these tests were conducted periodically to validate ballistic missiles.