

G8 summit leaders hail Iraq vote

BBC News ONLINE

US President George W Bush has opened the annual Group of Eight (G8) summit, hailing the unanimous passing of a new UN resolution on Iraq hours earlier. Speaking at the summit venue on Sea Island off Georgia, Mr Bush said the UN Security Council vote was a "great victory for the Iraqi people".

UK Prime Minister Tony Blair said the US-UK resolution was "a milestone".

The summit is taking place amid tight security, with thousands of troops and police virtually sealing the island. The three-day talks are expected to be dominated by Iraq, democratic reforms in the Middle East and debt relief for poor nations.

However, the approval of the UN resolution may take Iraq and the Middle East to the centre stage at the summit despite the efforts of other parts of the world, such as Africa, to compete for attention.

Egypt and Saudi Arabia have turned down the president's invitation to attend the summit, apparently suspicious of Mr Bush's plan to promote democracy in the Middle East.



Two Iraqi boys flash the V-sign in front of a trailer-truck engulfed in flames and smoke following an attack on a US convoy in the northwestern Baghdad neighbourhood of al-Khadra, yesterday. Assaultants in a speeding car raked a US military convoy, igniting the truck, two Iraqi witnesses and a US soldier said.

PHOTO: AFP

UN RESOLUTION ON IRAQ

Division between Shias and Kurds to widen

AFP, Baghdad

The adoption of a UN resolution endorsing Iraq's future sovereignty fuelled a row Wednesday between Shias and Kurds who are divided over the fate of the country's interim constitution, politicians said.

The text failed to refer explicitly to Iraq's Transitional Administrative Law (TAL), a temporary law which sets out Iraq's political future until a fully elected government takes control, said public works minister Nasreen Barwari.

"As a Kurd and as a woman I am disappointed that it (the UN resolution) does not recognise the TAL as a future basis for a constitution," said Barwari.

The interim law gives Iraqis their first bill of rights, establishes the first-ever quota in a future parliament for women and enshrines Iraq as a federal state -- a key desire for the country's north-

based Kurds.

But influential Shiite cleric Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani has refused to recognise the interim constitution, which he sees as drawn up by the US-picked Governing Council set up after Saddam Hussein's overthrow in 2003.

The TAL was passed in March by the council, which was dissolved June 1 and a new interim government set up ahead of the June 30 return of a measure of sovereignty by US-led occupation forces.

"That document paves the way for a true democracy," Barwari argued.

"I feel threatened," she said, explaining that the fate of the rights incorporated in the text were "all up in the air and I am not sure that they will be adopted."

The creation of the new government was laid out in the interim constitution so a failure to acknowledge it in the UN resolu-

tion cast a doubt over the legality of the Security Council blueprint, she said.

"I am amazed and also I question how the document merits legally."

Kurds fear the country's Shiite majority will try to change the TAL, taking away their rights to self-rule and stripping them of their implicit veto over a permanent constitution, which is to be put before a referendum at the end of 2005.

In contrast, the deputy to former Shia Governing Council member Mohammed Bahr al-Ulum said it was wise not to refer to the constitution in the resolution to avoid any confrontation.

"On the one hand Sistani said it was not good to refer to the TAL and on the other hand the Kurds have threatened to withdraw from the political process if (no reference was made)," Sami el-Askari told AFP.

"I think it is positive if they don't mention the TAL," he said.

ISRAEL IN NEW TURMOIL

Coalition partner chief quits cabinet

AFP, Jerusalem

Ariel Sharon's government was plunged into new turmoil when the leader of one of his coalition partners quit the Israeli cabinet in protest at the prime minister's Gaza pullout plan.

"The cabinet decision (to approve the Gaza pullout) offers Hamas a terrorist state on a plate, at the expense of the blood of Jews," Housing Minister Effi Eitam charged in his letter to Sharon.

A party colleague, junior minister Yitzhak Levy, also submitted his resignation in protest at the cabinet's decision on Sunday to approve Sharon's so-called disengagement plan.

"The flag of the Land of Israel has been lowered to half-mast in your days," Levy, who was not a member of the cabinet, wrote in his

resignation letter.

But another of the NRP's six deputies, Welfare Minister Zevulun Orlev, has decided to remain in the cabinet. Orlev was reported to be furious at his colleagues' decision and had urged them to reconsider.

Public radio said that despite Eitam and Levy's exit from the government, the party would continue to support Sharon's coalition in parliament.

Their departure comes just days after Sharon sacked two members of another party which supports Jewish settlement on Palestinian land, the National Union, on Friday.

While their dismissal ensured him a victory in cabinet on Sunday, that left him with the theoretical support of just 62 of the 120 depu-

ties in the Knesset even before Eitam and Levy's resignations.

Eitam had savaged the cabinet decision to back Sharon's disengagement plan, which envisages the evacuation of all 21 of the settlements in the Gaza Strip and another four isolated enclaves in the northern West Bank, as "one of the blackest decisions ever taken by the Israeli government."

But Sunday's agreement also stipulated that no pullouts from Gaza would take place before March 2005 at the earliest and each phase of the evacuation process would be subject to a separate vote in parliament.

Senior figures in the party had called for the ministers to remain in place for at least the next three months in order to oppose the plan from a position of strength.

Ashcroft grilled about US rules on torture

REUTERS, Washington

US Attorney General John Ashcroft on Tuesday refused to release memos detailing US torture policy as lawmakers accused him of trying to hide how the Bush administration has justified the abuse of prisoners.

Several US senators demanded he release copies of memos obtained by newspapers that showed Ashcroft's Justice Department had offered justification to use torture of al Qaeda detainees if it were done in the name of national security. During three hours of testimony before the US Senate Judiciary Committee

-- a session marked by several sharp exchanges -- Ashcroft refused to provide copies of the memos, saying they were part of his private advice to the president. "We believe that to provide this kind of information would impair the ability of advice-giving in the executive branch," Ashcroft said.

Sen. Dianne Feinstein, a

California Democrat, said critical information was being withheld from the Congress. "These memos clearly do exist, and ... they appear to be an effort to redefine torture and narrow the prohibition against it by carving out a class of something called exceptional interrogation," she said.

"So these memos actually either reverse or substantially alter 30 years of interpretation by our body, as well as the executive, of the Geneva Conventions."

Ashcroft said it was not the Justice Department's policy to define torture.

But he did say the international rules governing treatment of detainees did not apply to groups like al Qaeda since only countries are signatories to the treaty.

Democratic Sen. Edward Kennedy of Massachusetts warned that abuses like those recently uncovered in the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq occur when international laws regarding torture are not followed.

Allawi helped CIA in plans to attack Iraq: NYT

REUTERS, New York

New Iraqi Prime Minister Iyad Allawi worked with the CIA as head of an exile group that sent agents into Baghdad in the early 1990s to plant bombs and sabotage government facilities, The New York Times reported on Wednesday.

Allawi's group, the Iraqi National Accord, used car bombs and other explosive devices smuggled into Baghdad from northern Iraq in its attempts to depose President Saddam Hussein, the newspaper said, citing former intelligence officials.

The bombings, whose effectiveness is disputed, never threatened Saddam's rule, the former intelligence officials said, according to the Times.

BBC to hire armed guards for staff in hostile areas

AP, London

The British Broadcasting Corp has decided to hire armed guards from Western countries in "exceptional circumstances" to protect its journalists working in hostile areas, the broadcaster said.

The shift in policy was announced after an attack by gunmen on a BBC television crew on Sunday in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. An Irish cameraman, Simon Cumbers, 36, was killed in the shooting, and a British reporter, Frank Gardner, 42, was critically injured.

A BBC spokeswoman denied, however, that the new policy had arisen as a result of the attack on Cumbers and Gardner and said it was the outcome of six months of discussions.

The BBC would employ guards only "in certain exceptional circumstances," the spokeswoman said on Tuesday, speaking on condition of anonymity.

Until now, the BBC has employed guards only to protect its facilities.

Tens of thousands bid farewell to Reagan

AFP, Simi Valley

Tens of thousands of Americans, including Hollywood stars and politicians, paid solemn personal tributes to Ronald Reagan, queuing for hours to file past his coffin.

The flood of people overwhelmed staff at Reagan's presidential library, which had stayed open throughout the night to allow the snaking lines of admirers to bid farewell to the 1980s "Cold War Warrior."

More than 80,000 passed the coffin after viewing hours were extended by four hours when the line grew to 1.6 kilometers (one mile) ahead of the start of a three-day series of state funeral events in Washington.

Some well-wishers endured sleepless 12-hour journeys from their homes to the coffin to carry out their often tearful pilgrimage to the charismatic leader.

Reagan's widow, Nancy, was deeply moved by the mass mobilisation and flood of affection for her husband of 52 years, who died Saturday aged 93 after a 10-year battle with Alzheimer's disease.

"It's unbelievable what I'm seeing on television," she said in a statement issued by Reagan's office. "The outpouring of love for my husband is truly amazing."

Among the army of mourners paying silent tribute to the former Republican president's flag-draped coffin was Democratic presidential hopeful John Kerry.

Kerry, who has suspended electoral campaigning this week out of respect for Reagan, stood before the casket, appeared to say a prayer in the silent room, crossed himself and then left quietly.

Hollywood movie stars Bo Derek, who starred in the 1979 movie "10," and Morgan Fairchild also joined the crowds to pay their last respects to Reagan, who was a matinee idol before launching his political career.

New Mexico Governor Bill Richardson, a Democrat, also visited the library, while California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger, who, like Reagan, was a Hollywood star before becoming governor, paid tribute on Monday.



PHOTO: AFP

Former hostage Maurizio Agliana (L) is greeted by his sister Antonella, as the three Italian hostages freed yesterday by coalition forces in Iraq, arrive at Rome's Ciampino airport, yesterday after two months in captivity. The three security guards taken hostage on April 12 by Iraqi insurgents appeared in good health as they stepped down from the plane into the arms of their overjoyed families and the glare of media attention.

Tainted ministers issue rocks Indian parliament

PTI, New Delhi

For the second consecutive day, both Houses of Parliament were on Wednesday adjourned for the day as an unrelenting Opposition paralysed proceedings protesting induction of "tainted" persons as ministers in the Manmohan Singh Government.

The only business that was transacted without any interruption in the Lok Sabha was the election of Deputy Speaker Charanjit Singh Atwal with leaders from both sides felicitating the Akali Dal leader.

In the din in both Houses, Defence Minister Pranab Mukherjee made a statement on the use of the Air Force in Kargil conflict.

The opposition members raised slogans "daagi mantri hatao, desh

bachao (remove the tainted ministers and save the nation)" and "daagi mantri istifa do (tainted ministers resign)" in the Rajya Sabha.

To shout them down, the members from the treasury benches chanted "we want discussion (on Motion of Thanks on the President's address)."

Amid uproar in the Upper House, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh introduced four of his ministerial colleagues -- Ghulam Nabi Azad, Sis Ram Ola, A Raja and EVKS Elangovan -- who were not present on the first day of introduction.

Chairman Bhairon Singh Shekhawat told the agitated members that if the Leader of the Opposition wanted to have his say, he would be granted that but added the rider that they would have to listen to the Prime Minister also.

Japanese hostage sues govt for role in Iraq

AFP, Tokyo

A Japanese activist who was taken hostage in Iraq has filed a lawsuit against his government claiming that Tokyo's dispatch of troops to the country is to blame for his ordeal, a court official said Wednesday.

Nobutaka Watanabe, 36, a peace activist, filed the suit, which argues that he was kidnapped in Iraq because of the "illegal" deployment of Japanese troops, with the Tokyo District Court Tuesday, the court official said.

He is seeking a ruling that the dispatch to the southern Iraqi city of Samawa is illegal to force the government to pull back troops from Iraq, where they are providing reconstruction help.

Watanabe is also demanding five million yen (45,700 dollars) in damages for mental and physical suffering.

The government said it could not comment in detail before reading the lawsuit.

"Generally speaking, we are likely to work with the Japan

Defense Agency on the case," said a spokesman at the justice ministry.

"We have yet to examine the lawsuit. But we will probably deal with it just like other similar cases," he said.

Watanabe, who went to Iraq to monitor the activities of the Japanese troops, was captured in April along with freelance journalist Jumpei Yasuda by a militant group near Baghdad. They were released unharmed after three days.