

'Ancient Iraqi cities destroyed by US attacks, looting'

AFP, Babylon

The last remains of some of mankind's earliest cities have virtually disappeared through unprecedented looting triggered by the US-led invasion of Iraq, experts said.

Lawlessness and instability have accelerated a process that started in the 1990s but has now reached critical levels, with dozens of archaeological sites plundered to extinction in the past year.

And the presence of US-led troops in one of the world's most glorious ancient capitals has not helped either.

The ancient people of Iraq, often described as the cradle of civilisation, are credited with inventing the wheel, writing and mathematics and developing a culture and history which has resonated through the ages.

"It's one of the major, major

tragedies around the world. We have basically lost most of the ancient cities of Sumer," said Chicago-based professor McGuire Gibson, referring to one of man's earliest civilisations which dates back to around 3,000 BC.

"There's a culture of looting which has never been on this scale before -- it's totally unprecedented. In this last year we have lost more sites than ever before."

Gibson, who has been visiting Iraq since the 1960s, said an Istanbul conference on the destruction last month was "shocked" by aerial photographs showing the desecration of sites in the months after the invasion.

"Everybody is shocked at what happened. They couldn't believe the pictures we were showing of the damage to the sites," he said, adding that "dozens" of sites had been lost.

Six Palestinians, Israeli officer killed in clashes

REUTERS, Nablus

Palestinian militants shot dead an Israeli special forces officer involved in a commando raid that killed two gunmen and two civilians in the West Bank yesterday, witnesses and military sources said.

In the Gaza Strip, Israeli troops killed two Palestinian militants who tried to attack their guardpost on the Kissufim road leading to the boundary with Israel, military sources said.

Violence in an almost four-year-old Palestinian revolt is sputtering on in the extended run-up to Israel's planned 2005 evacuation of all settlers from Gaza and some from the West Bank.

Israeli army commandos raided a residential building in the Ein Beit Ilma refugee camp in the city of Nablus before dawn, killing two senior men from the Popular Front

for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), residents and military sources reported.

The Israeli army said special forces Lieutenant Moran Vardi, 25, was killed and three other soldiers wounded in a gun battle.

Residents said the commandos also shot dead two neighbors -- a 50-year-old Palestinian academic and his 16-year-old son -- at the door of their apartment.

Israeli military sources said a militant who survived the initial gunfight had taken refuge in a flat next door.

The wife of Khaled Salah, an engineering professor at Nablus's al-Najah University, told Reuters that troops who banged on his apartment door shot him as soon as he opened it and then his son standing behind him.

Palestinian security sources identified the dead militants as

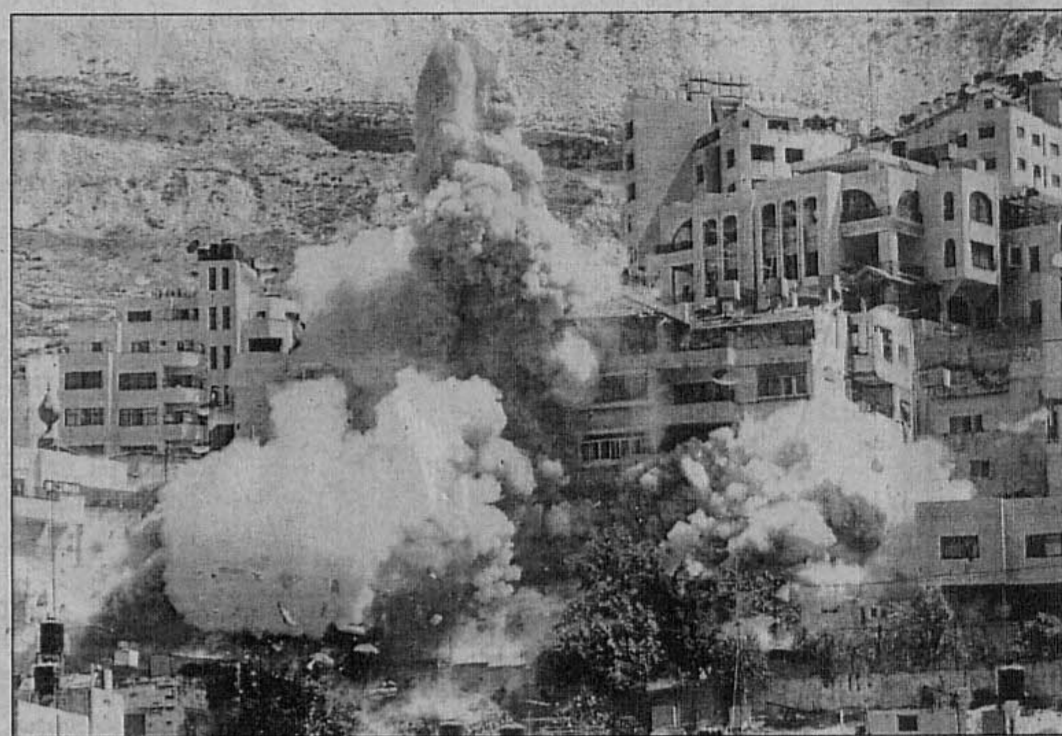
Yaman Faraj, the PFLP's West Bank commander, and a deputy.

Residents in Nablus, the main urban stronghold of West Bank militant groups, said Israeli forces later dynamited the PFLP militants' hideout in Ein Beit Ilma.

In Gaza, military sources said two Palestinian gunmen crept to within 20 meters (65 feet) of the army post near Kissufim and opened fire with automatic rifles and grenades. Soldiers returned fire and killed both, they said.

Soldiers backed by tanks and helicopters also entered the Gaza refugee camp of Rafah in another in a series of searches for tunnels used to smuggle in weapons from nearby Egypt.

Rafah residents said troops were flattening abandoned shops in one neighborhood. Medics said two Palestinians were lightly wounded by gunfire into the camp.



A Palestinian house is detonated by the Israeli army in the northern West Bank city of Nablus yesterday. An Israeli army officer and six Palestinians were killed in exchanges of fire earlier in the day around the Ain Beit Ilma refugee camp. The shooting occurred during an operation aimed at arresting wanted Palestinian activists.



Swedish Foreign Minister Laila Freivalds (R) greets Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf before their meeting yesterday in Stockholm. Musharraf, the first Pakistani president ever to visit Sweden, will visit Finland next.

Musharraf links peace to resolution of Kashmir row

'Fencing of border violates agreements'

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf has linked lasting peace in South Asia to the resolution of the festering Kashmir dispute with nuclear arch-rival India, reports said yesterday.

"The Kashmir dispute has to be resolved for the establishment of lasting peace in the region," mainstream newspapers quoted Musharraf telling reporters in Harpsund, Sweden, after talks with Swedish Prime Minister Goeran Persson.

"Without resolution of the long-standing dispute there cannot be durable peace," Musharraf said.

Musharraf arrived in Sweden on an official visit on Sunday as the first Pakistani head of state to visit the Scandinavian country. He will also visit Finland.

The Pakistani leader said three parties were involved in the Kashmir dispute -- Pakistan, India and the people of the Himalayan state of

Kashmir.

India says all of Muslim-majority Kashmir is an integral part of its territory and accuses Pakistan of fomenting an insurgency against Indian rule that has claimed tens of thousands of lives since 1989.

Pakistan, which controls about a third of the disputed region, rejects the charges but calls the rebellion a "freedom struggle" and demands a plebiscite among Kashmiris as called for by UN resolutions.

The two countries, which have fought three wars, were on the brink of nuclear confrontation over Kashmir in 2002 after an Islamic militant attack on the Indian parliament which New Delhi alleged was carried out by Pakistani-backed rebel groups.

Relations began to thaw in the two countries when in April last year and both have been observing a ceasefire along the disputed Kashmir border since November.

The countries, wrapping up their first Kashmir talks in three years,

issued a statement last month pledging to "continue the sustained and serious dialogue to find a peaceful, negotiated final settlement" on the dispute.

Meanwhile, Pakistan Monday said it had not approved India's fencing of a de-facto border in divided Kashmir and accused its traditional rival of violating bilateral and international agreements.

"We have not given any understanding or approval to the construction of the fence along the LoC (Line of Control)," foreign ministry spokesman Masood Khan told a weekly press briefing.

"We have not given tacit or open understanding and the fact is that repeatedly we have approached the Indian authorities and reminded them that construction of the fence along the LoC is in violation of bilateral agreements and the international agreements that Pakistan and India subscribe to."

NDA boycotts Lok Sabha protesting presence of 'tainted ministers'

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

India's BJP-led opposition yesterday boycotted parliament protesting presence of "tainted" ministers in the government of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh but announced to abandon its decision to stall proceedings of parliament.

The boycott lasted the whole day and will be lifted when parliament meets today even as the opposition decided to continue its agitation to drop the ministers who are facing criminal charges.

The boycott covered presentation of railway budget, the second most important economic event, by Railway Minister and Bihar strongman Lalu Prasad Yadav who is among the federal ministers facing charges and court cases.

The decision to stop stalling parliament proceedings was taken at a meeting of opposition lawmakers after which a resolution said

"unlike the Congress, the Communists and the RJD, who frequently disrupted the proceedings of the House during the six-year long rule of Atal Bihari Vajpayee government, the NDA believes in the smooth functioning of parliament... the NDA will perform its duty conscientiously."

Tuesday's decision ends the impasse witnessed in parliament since the brief opening session of the 14th Lok Sabha last month when BJP-led NDA stalled proceedings. The opening day of the Budget Session on Monday was also washed out by the NDA protest.

Leader of opposition in Lok Sabha L.K. Advani later told reporters that the meeting felt that the proceedings should be allowed and important issues should be discussed. "This form (stalling of proceedings) of protest will end today. There will be different forms of protest from today," he said.

WMD may never be found: Blair

REUTERS, London

Tony Blair has admitted that biological and chemical weapons, which he once insisted Saddam Hussein had primed for use, may never be found.

In testimony to a committee of senior MPs yesterday, the prime minister also insisted he had exerted real influence over Washington's approach to post-war Iraq and defended to the hilt his close ties with President George W. Bush.

"We know Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction but we know we haven't found them," Blair said. "I have to accept we have not found them, that we may not find them."

Blair persuaded reluctant MPs to back war on Iraq last year on the basis that Baghdad had banned weapons and could use them at any time.

A now notorious dossier, released in September 2002, said some of them could have been let

loose within 45 minutes of an order to do so.

Yet more than a year after Saddam was toppled, no such weapons have been found. Blair's public trust ratings have withered over the same period.

Blair said the absence of banned weapons did not mean Saddam posed no threat to the region and to world stability, and that he was glad he had been deposed.

"They could have been hidden, they could have been destroyed," he said. "The truth is, he was a threat."

Many in the Labour Party have not forgiven him for the war and his "shoulder-to-shoulder" stance with President George W. Bush since the September 11 attacks on the United States.

Critics claim the premier has secured little in return.

"I can see particularly within my own political family, it's a problem

sometimes," Blair said, but refused to give up London's closeness with Washington despite disagreements over issues like climate change.

He said full transfer of sovereignty to an Iraqi government, and an emphasis on building up domestic forces rather than pouring in more foreign troops, was a British blueprint.

"If you look at what has happened in Iraq recently... I think we have had a very great deal of influence," he said.

Usually collected, the premier was riled by persistent questioning about any gains he had secured by consistently supporting Bush, often at the expense of European allies.

"We have a good relationship, believe it or not, with France and Germany but I am not going to have the relationship with the United States of America subordinated to the interests of any other country," Blair said.

IAEA to press Israel to keep ME nuke free

REUTERS, Vienna

UN nuclear watchdog head Mohamed ElBaradei hopes to get Israel to begin talks on ridding the Middle East of nuclear weapons, whether it admits to having them or not, when he flies to the Jewish state yesterday.

Under its policy of "strategic ambiguity," Israel neither admits nor denies having nuclear weapons. But international experts believe Israel has from 100 to 200 warheads based on estimates of the amount of plutonium its reactors have produced.

ElBaradei had wanted to get the Israelis to abandon their ambiguity policy, Western diplomats said, but Israel has made clear this was impossible at present.

"There are no signs of a policy change in Israel," said a diplomat close to the International Atomic Energy Agency.

The diplomat, who declined to be identified, said ElBaradei would not be pushing Israel to abandon the policy, which it has adhered to for decades to avoid sparking an atomic arms race in the region.

But the diplomat said ElBaradei

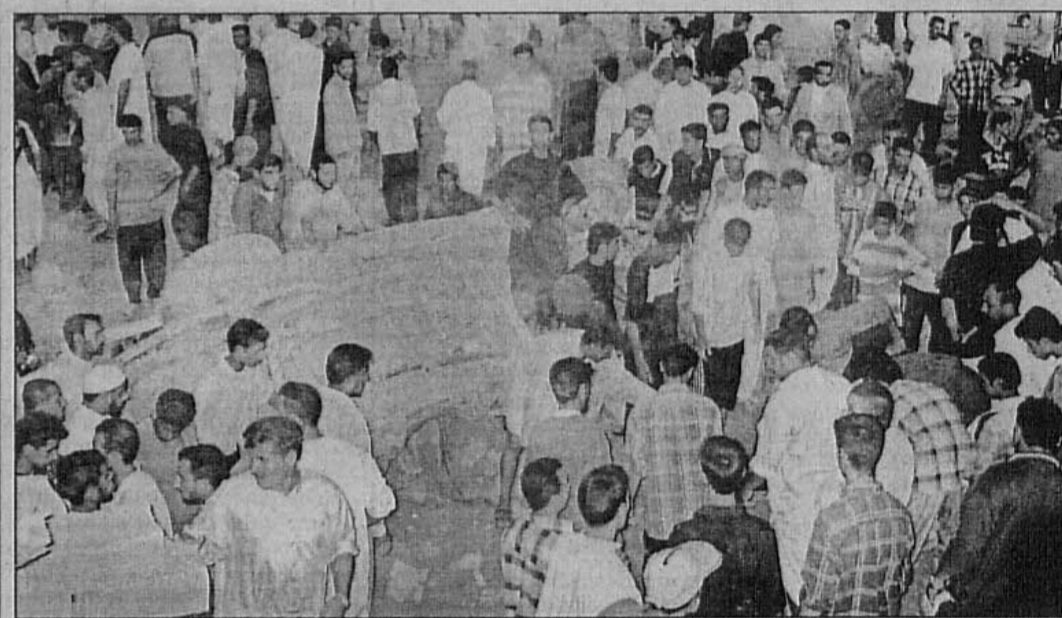
intended to "promote the concept of a nuclear free zone in the Middle East" in meetings with senior Israeli officials including Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom.

Israel is the only country in the Middle East that has not signed the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). This means it is not obliged to show or declare its nuclear facilities or activities to UN inspectors.

A top Israeli analyst said it would be unwise for Israel to give up any nuclear deterrent or sign the NPT now because of the instability of the Middle East.

"The threat to Israel has not diminished much in the past five decades and hatred of Israel in the Arab and Muslim worlds remains intense," Gerald Steinberg, a fellow at the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, wrote about ElBaradei's visit.

Israel and the United States both accuse Iran of pursuing nuclear weapons, a charge that Tehran denies. Libya and pre-war Iraq are also known to have unsuccessfully pursued atomic weapons. All three had considered themselves enemies of Israel.



Iraqis gather at the scene of a US military air strike on a suspected safe house of al-Qaeda fugitive Abu Mussab al-Zarqawi late Monday that killed 13 people and wounded five others in the restive Iraqi city of Fallujah, 50km west of Baghdad. Iraqi Prime Minister Iyad Allawi described the raid, which gouged a deep crater in the southeastern Shuhada district of Fallujah, as a "precision strike".

Kidnapped US Marine freed in Iraq: Brother

REUTERS, Baghdad

Kidnappers in Iraq released yesterday a Lebanese-born US marine they were once thought to have decapitated, his brother said.

Wassef Ali Hassoun's brother Sami, speaking from the northern Lebanese city of Tripoli, said his family had received word Hassoun was alive and had been freed in the early hours, but declined to specify the source of the information.

The US military in Baghdad did not immediately confirm that Hassoun, missing since June 21, had been released.

"We got solid assurances that my brother is alive and was released today," the marine's brother told reporters.

Conflicting statements on Web sites have sown confusion about Hassoun's fate in the last few days. One Islamist group denied a claim put out in its name that he had been beheaded.

The Islamic Response Movement said late on Monday he had been moved to "safety" after pledging to leave the military.

Kidnappings have helped spread a climate of fear in Iraq, with foreign-

ers joining the target list since April.

British Prime Minister Tony Blair said Saddam Hussein had been a threat, even though the chemical and biological arms he once insisted the former dictator had primed for action might never be found. "They could have been hidden, they could have been destroyed," he said in London.

Britain's first ambassador to Iraq since diplomatic ties were cut in 1990 arrived in Baghdad. Edward Chaplin will present his credentials on Wednesday, a British spokesman said.

Allawi said his government and US-led forces had consulted before the latest Fallujah bombing.

"Iraqi security forces provided clear and compelling intelligence to conduct a precision strike this evening on a known Zarqawi safe house in southeastern Falluja," he added.

Joining a propaganda war waged on the Internet and Arabic satellite TV channels, Iraqi gunmen calling themselves the Salvation Movement vowed to hunt Zarqawi because he "is not a son of this country and has killed thousands of its people."

Indonesia election set for run-off

BBC ONLINE

Early indications show that retired General Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono is leading the race in Indonesia's presidential elections.

But his lead appears far short of that needed to avoid a run-off in September.

Initial results from the National Election Commission put Yudhoyono just seven percentage points ahead of his nearest rival.

Millions of Indonesians turned out for Monday's poll - their first opportunity to elect a new leader.

No official turnout figures have been released, but media reports estimate that 80 percent of the 150 million eligible voters took part.

Early results gave Yudhoyono 33.2 percent of the vote, much less than pre-election poll estimates of 40-45 percent.

Incumbent President Megawati Sukarnoputri came in second, with former armed forces chief General Wiranto close behind.

The national election commission figures were roughly backed by a sample poll produced by the Washington-based National Democratic Institute.

Lanka preparing for war, say Tigers

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka's Tamil Tiger guerrillas yesterday accused government forces of preparing for war in the island's volatile east after the killing of a rebel political activist.

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in a statement posted on the pro-rebel Tamilnet website said Monday's violence showed the military was undermining the Norwegian-arranged ceasefire in place since February 2002.

"We have told the Sri Lanka army officers several times during phone conversations and during discussions that stopping killings in the east is in (the) Sri Lanka army's hands," the statement said.

"SLA has clearly ignored our notices."

"The killings clearly indicate that security forces are intent on undermining the memorandum of understanding (settling up the February 2002 truce) and are creating conditions for war," it added.

A Tiger activist was killed and three other rebels were wounded in separate incidents Monday by unidentified attackers, marring the

anniversary of the guerrillas' first suicide bombing, known as "Black Tiger Day".

President Chandrika Kumaratunga's office expressed concern at the shootings and said police had been ordered to arrest the assailants.

"These incidents jeopardise the law and order situation in the Eastern province, which the government is firmly committed to upholding," a statement from Kumaratunga's office said Monday.

The military sent a major general to the embattled region to investigate the killings, officials said.

The east was the stronghold of a breakaway Tiger leader who disbanded some 5,000 to 6,000 of his fighters in April and went underground after the LTTE leadership crushed the unprecedented split.

The LTTE has accused the government's military intelligence of using the breakaway leader, V. Muralitharan, better known as Karuna, to lead a proxy war against them despite the truce.

While the ceasefire remains in force, peace talks have been stalled since April 2003.

Investment Corporation of Bangladesh

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Establishment Department

Dated: 06 July, 2004

Tender Notice

Sub: Quotation for printing and supply of Annual Report for the year 2003-2004 & Minutes of the 27th Annual General Meeting of Shareholders of ICB

Sealed tenders are invited from reputed and established bonafide printing firms for printing & supply of ICB's Annual Report of the year 2003-2004 and Minutes of the 27th Annual General Meeting of the Shareholders of the Corporation as per specification mentioned in the tender schedule under the following terms and conditions in their letterhead pad:

Terms & Conditions:

01. The tenders can be dropped in the tender box kept in the Establishment Department of the Corporation on 27 July, 2004 upto 11:30 AM and will be opened on the same day at 11:45 AM in presence of the bidders (if any);
02. If, for any unavoidable circumstances, office of ICB remains closed on the prescribed date of submitting tender, then tender can be submitted on the next working day at the same time which will be opened at the same time as mentioned above;
03. 5% of the quoted price should be submitted with the tender as earnest money through Demand Draft/Pay Order from any scheduled bank located in Dhaka in favour of ICB;
04. Tender schedule should be purchased from the Establishment Department at 12th floor of the Head Office of ICB on payment of Tk 500.00 (five hundred) in cash (non-refundable). No tender schedule will be sold on the date of submitting tender;
05. ICB is not bound to accept the lowest tender. Acceptance of any tender is totally dependent on the decision of the competent authority. Besides, ICB reserves the right to accept or reject all or any application without assigning any reason.

Md Wahiduzzaman Khandaker
Deputy General Manager
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