

Chalabi returns to Iraq, files lawsuit against Jordan

AFP, Washington

Iraqi politician Ahmed Chalabi, who has returned to Iraq to face money counterfeiting charges, has filed a lawsuit in Washington against his 1992 conviction in absentia in Jordan on bank fraud charges, The New York Times said yesterday.

The lawsuit, filed Wednesday, was part of his effort to improve his reputation, following his fall from grace earlier this year when the information his organisation had passed on about Iraq's weapons of mass destruction was discredited.

A spokeswoman for the Jordanian Embassy here, Marissa Khurma, said the Jordanian government was surprised by the lawsuit, but had not received a copy of the legal action and so could not comment on it.

In 1992, Chalabi was sentenced to 22 years in prison in absentia in Jordan for fraud and embezzlement of several hundred million dollars after his Petra Bank went bankrupt, 12 years after he set it up.

Chalabi has dismissed the case as a conspiracy orchestrated by Saddam's regime, the Jordanian government and Mohammed Said Nabulsi, head of the Jordanian central bank.



PHOTO: AFP

Iraqi Shia Muslim protestors carry pictures of radical cleric Moqtada Sadr and other leading Shia figures during a rally in the southern city of Basra yesterday. Hundreds of Shia demonstrators marched from the headquarters of militiamen loyal to Sadr to the governor's office denouncing the US-backed offensive on the holy Shia city of Najaf.

Shia group threatens to kill 'collaborators'

Thousands protest US strikes in Najaf

AFP, Basra

A shadowy Shia militant group in the southern Iraqi city of Basra warned yesterday that it will kill all those working with British troops controlling the region.

"We will kill everyone working with British troops including contractors, interpreters and others," said a statement from the Abu al-Abbas Islamic group received by AFP.

It was not immediately clear if the group had any direct links with the Mehdi Army militia of radical cleric Moqtada Sadr which is clashing with US and Iraqi forces in Najaf further north.

Local deputy governor for administrative affairs Salam al-Maliky, a staunch Sadr supporter, warned late Wednesday to transform Basra into "another Najaf" if US troops did not end their assault on the holy city.

Iraq's oil exports from Basra, the only outflow, have been slashed in half since Monday after Maliky called for all exports and production to halt in

protest against the Najaf fighting.

Meanwhile, up to 8,000 Shia Muslims gathered in the main southern Iraqi city of Basra on Thursday to protest against a US military assault against the militiamen of radical Shia Muslim cleric Moqtada Sadr.

The protesters, who included local leaders, marched through the streets of Basra shouting slogans, while carrying aloft pictures of Sadr and banners in support of his crusade, an AFP photographer said.

They later congregated near the governor's office, guarded by Iraqi security forces, to denounce US military action and interim Prime Minister Iyad Allawi.

The march was peaceful amid a discreet Iraqi police presence, the photographer said.

Meanwhile, in Baghdad's Shia neighbourhood of Kadhimiya, thousands gathered in a similar protest denouncing US action against Sadr's Mehdi Army.

Protesters carried banners saying "Islam is a religion of peace" and "why

are you Americans here? Bush is living safely while you are fighting here".

One protester was also seen carrying a picture of disgraced politician Ahmed Chalabi, who has returned to Iraq to face an arrest warrant for banknote forgery.

In another development, the UN Security Council was expected yesterday to prolong by one year the UN Assistance Mission for Iraq, diplomatic sources said.

The mandate of the mission, created on August 14, 2003, expires today.

A diplomatic source said the resolution to extend would be co-sponsored by all 15 Security Council members, suggesting a unanimous vote.

The council's current president, Russian Ambassador Andrei Denisov, said the vote will take place early Thursday.

The resolution needs a minimum of nine votes to pass. Any of the five permanent council members, the United States, Russia, Britain, France and China, could veto it.

FORMER IRAQI NUCLEAR CHIEF SAYS Saddam gave up all WMD after Gulf War

AFP, Paris

Saddam Hussein gave up all of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction in the wake of the 1991 Gulf War, the scientist who headed his nuclear programme, Jaffar Dhia Jaffar, said in a BBC interview Wednesday.

"There was no capability. There was no chemical or biological or any what are called weapons of mass destruction," said Jaffar in what BBC television called his first-ever broadcast interview.

Speaking in Paris, where he now lives, Jaffar -- who ran Saddam's nuclear programme for 25 years -- said there was "no development" of chemical, biological or nuclear weapons "at any time after 1991".

He said he knew that for a fact "because I am in touch with the people concerned".

Saddam's quest for weapons of mass destruction -- and the fear that they might fall into the hands of global terrorists -- was one of the prime reasons given for the US and British invasion of Iraq in March 2003.

Nearly 18 months on, no such

weapons have been uncovered -- a fact that both US President George W. Bush and British Prime Minister Tony Blair have been forced to concede.

Jaffar told the BBC he remained loyal to Saddam's regime until he slipped out of Iraq via Syria two days before the fall of Baghdad which signalled the collapse of the longtime Iraqi dictator.

The nuclear scientist -- who was educated in Britain, and has been described by some as the father of Iraq's nuclear programme -- said he had been approached by the United States to defect, but was never tempted to do so.

"I don't think it's right to defect," he said.

A transcript of Jaffar's interview with the current affairs show "Newsnight" was released in advance of broadcast. Excerpts also appeared on the BBC's website ([www.bbc.co.uk/news](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news)).

He revealed that under Saddam, Iraq "specifically" adopted a programme to build a nuclear bomb in late 1987 -- six years after Israeli warplanes bombed the country's Osiris nuclear reactor for fear it might actually do just that.

UN official blasts Israel, Palestinians for violence

Israeli Army raids Gaza amp

AFP, United Nations

A top UN official on Wednesday accused Israel and the Palestinian Authority of violating their "international legal obligations" by failing to protect civilians in the Middle East.

"There has been no tangible progress towards resuming the peace process in the Middle East" in the last month, and violence "has continued to claim innocent lives," Kieran Prendergast, the UN under secretary-general for political affairs, told the UN Security Council.

"Neither side has taken adequate steps to protect civilians, and both are in breach of their international legal obligations," Prendergast said during the council's monthly meeting on the situation in the Middle East.

He said both sides have failed to meet their obligations under the UN-backed "roadmap" for peace plan.

"Israel, as the occupying power, has obligations to protect Palestinian civilians and not to destroy their property, unless this is rendered absolutely necessary by military operations," he said. "Palestinian civilians continue to fall victim in Israeli military operations."

And the Palestinian Authority "has obligations, under agreements reached with Israel, international humanitarian law and its commitments to the roadmap to protect Israeli civilians from attacks emanating from territories in its control," Prendergast said.

"It has failed to live up to those obligations," he added.

Since the September 2000 start of

the Palestinian uprising, or Intifada, 34,770 Palestinians and 6,102 have been killed or injured, he said.

"A new and worrying pattern has recently been emerging: Palestinian militants launch Qassam rockets into Israel followed by Israeli helicopter missile strikes into the Gaza Strip and ever deeper incursions into areas adjacent to Israel," the senior UN official said.

Reuters adds: Israeli tanks and bulldozers rolled into a Gaza refugee camp yesterday and began demolishing houses hours after a West Bank checkpoint car bombing killed two Palestinians.

A military source said troops had entered the Rafah camp to conduct a "centered operation against terror infrastructures in the area."

MOVE TO EASE TENSION WITH SUDAN Deadline renewable, says UN envoy

AFP, Khartoum

UN envoy Jan Pronk said a Security Council deadline for Khartoum to take action to end the Darfur crisis was renewable, in an apparent bid to ease tensions, a Sudanese daily reported yesterday.

Pronk, quoted in Akhbar Al-Youm, said an action plan agreed to by Khartoum "does not set 30 days as a deadline but as a period which can be renewed and amended until all provisions" of a Security Council resolution are implemented.

The action plan for Darfur signed Tuesday by Pronk and Sudan's Foreign Minister Mustafa Ismail gave the authorities 30 days to create safe areas for civilians to search for food and cultivate their land without fear of attack.

On July 30, the Security Council passed a resolution giving Khartoum 30 days to crack down on the pro-government Arab Janjaweed militias, which are accused of committing atrocities

against the black African population in Darfur.

The government has since been accused of failing to rein in the marauding militias and continuing air raids on Darfur, as well as putting pressure on displaced Darfuris to return to their villages and arresting those who spoke to foreign officials or journalists.

The barrage of accusations sparked the ire of President Omar al-Beshir, who has accused Western powers of seeking to plunder his country's resources and called on the United Nations to tone down its statements.

Akhbar Al-Youm quoted Pronk as giving assurances that the Security Council was "not prejudiced against the Sudan but is exerting pressures in accordance with international standards and agreements which the Sudan has signed".

Bush, Kerry dueling over Saudi Arabia

AFP, Albuquerque

Much the way their predecessors warred over Sino-US ties in past elections, US President George W. Bush and Democratic White House hopeful John Kerry are trading blows over Saudi Arabia.

Bush says he has led Riyadh to take a tougher stand on terrorism since the September 11, 2001 attacks, while Kerry has insinuated that the incumbent is too close to the Saudi royal family to force necessary changes to US policy.

"Before September 11, in Saudi Arabia, terrorists were raising money and recruiting and operating with little opposition. Today, the Saudi government is taking the fight to al-Qaeda, and America and the world are safer," Bush told cheering supporters on Tuesday.

The line has become a fixture of

Bush's speech to voters, part of his election-year argument that he has made the United States and the world more secure since the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon in 2001.

"I want an America that relies on its own ingenuity and innovation, not the Saudi royal family," Kerry said in the highest-profile speech of his political life, accepting his party's nomination for president.

The charge is part of a broader attack on Bush and especially Vice President Dick Cheney as back-room deal-cutters who put corporate profits ahead of public interest in making policy.

Both candidates say they want to wean the United States from its addiction to oil imports, which appeals both to environmental worries and to the US public's deep unease over dependence on the Middle East.



PHOTO: AFP

A motorcyclist rides under a rain shower in a street in Keelung, northern Taiwan yesterday. Taiwan's weather bureau warned residents to protect themselves against approaching Typhoon Rananim, which it said could bring strong winds and heavy rains that could cause landslides.



PHOTO: AFP

A boy rests in the shade of a makeshift shelter Wednesday after a 5.6 Richter-scale quake rocked Ludian County in southwest Yunnan province on August 10. More than 125,000 people have been left homeless as the quake ravaged the region leaving four people dead and nearly 600 injured.