



PHOTO: AFP
A militiaman loyal to radical Shia Muslim cleric Moqtada Sadr takes position as a car burns in the southern Iraqi city of Basra yesterday after three British civilian vehicles were hit by a roadside bomb, causing no casualties.

Iraq's legislature takes shape even before vote

AFP, Baghdad

Most members of Iraq's national council were chosen long before a scheduled vote yesterday that is supposed to appoint the interim legislative body during a conference billed as a first step towards democracy.

"The makeup and list of people on the national council has largely been decided already," said a senior delegate on the preparatory committee for the three-day conference, which started Sunday.

"Leaving it to a truly open vote may bring in people that would threaten the strategic plan that has already been charted for Iraq."

Nineteen of the 100 seats on the council have already been handed to members of the defunct governing council, which was created by the US-led occupation shortly after the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime in 2003 and included many figures that fought the

regime from exile.

According to conference rules, delegates of different leanings -- Islamists, secular, Kurdish, Arab or otherwise -- are supposed to draw up lists for the remaining 81 seats and submit them to an open vote.

The one gaining a 51-percent majority would be the winning list.

"It is really straightforward and judges with known integrity will oversee the whole process," assured Fuad Maasum, head of the conference's preparatory committee.

All lists should more or less conform to previous agreements dating back to 1991 among the country's then exiled opposition parties, as the various ethnic and religious groups plotted to overthrow Saddam's Sunni Muslim dominated regime, a Sunni party official said.

"For example Shias must get 52 percent of all 100 seats or Islamists get 33 percent and so on and so forth" said Dia al-Shukurji of the Dawa party, the main

grouping of the majority Shias.

Another official close to the process said the 81 seats would be divided as follows: 21 party members, 21 provincial leaders, 11 minorities, 10 tribal figures, 10 civil society organisations and eight independents.

Women have been already granted 25 percent of all council seats.

Many independents attending the conference have already cried foul and demanded that a direct vote of candidates takes place.

"One of our main disagreements with the preparatory committee is that political parties should not dominate the process and that the average Iraqi must feel that this is truly an opportunity for him or her to enter political life," said former oil minister Ibrahim Bahr al-Ulum.

NAM MEET OPENS

S Africa slams US 'anti-terror campaign'

AFP, Durban

South Africa yesterday implicitly criticised the United States and its allies for "mounting global campaigns" against perceived threats and called for a concrete response from the Non-Aligned Movement.

Opening a two-day conference of the 117-nation NAM in the eastern port city of Durban, South African Deputy Foreign Minister Sue van der Merwe said the United Nations must be the "pre-eminent authority" in world affairs.

"There is a growing tendency on the part of countries of the North to mount global 'campaigns' against threats that are perceived and defined in the North but allegedly originate or are based in the countries of the South," said Van der Merwe.

"This is done without the prior acknowledgement of the contributions of developing countries to both the definition and also the condemnation of these threats."

Sharon approves 1,000 settlements in WB

US to monitor activity, Palestinians say Tel Aviv killing roadmap

REUTERS, AFP, Jerusalem

Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon has approved building tenders for 1,000 more homes in Jewish settlements in the West Bank frozen earlier to avoid upsetting the United States, political sources said yesterday.

A political source said the move aimed to defuse resistance in Sharon's Likud party to his Gaza pullout plan and to bringing center-left proponents into his coalition. Likud members are to convene on Wednesday to vote on a link-up with the Labour party.

The sources said the tender package did not flout recent understandings with Washington that new Jewish housing in the occupied West Bank, where Palestinians are in revolt, would be built within existing settlement boundaries.

They noted that President Bush assured Sharon in April that if he carried

out his "disengagement" from Gaza, Israel could count on retaining parts of the West Bank with some large settlements under any future peace deal with Palestinians.

But Washington has also been pressing Israel to dismantle proliferating settler outposts and curb settlement expansion to help revive an internationally-backed peace "road map" promising Palestinians a viable state in the West Bank and Gaza.

Political sources said the tenders involved housing in seven settlements Sharon has vowed never to cede.

"Disengagement" entails removing all 21 Gaza settlements containing 8,000 Jews while retaining larger West Bank enclaves with most of the 240,000-strong settler population.

Sharon in the past three weeks also approved tenders for 800 additional homes in the largest West Bank settle-

ment, Maale Adumim.

AFP adds: A US delegation is to inspect Israel's settlement activity in the West Bank amid mounting frustration from Washington over Prime Minister Ariel Sharon government's failure to dismantle unauthorised settlement outposts.

US embassy spokesman Paul Patin said that the team was expected to arrive next month to "monitor Israel's compliance with the roadmap in terms of settlement activity."

Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon is killing off the roadmap peace plan by giving the green light to some 1,000 homes in West Bank settlements, Palestinian negotiations minister Saeb Erakat said Tuesday.

"This is a very serious development and will lead to the burying of the roadmap," Erakat told AFP.

Maldivian opposition for Indian intervention

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, New Delhi

A Maldivian opposition leader urged India to intervene to "restore some sanity" in his country following the imposition of emergency by the government to quell unprecedented protest demonstrations on Monday.

"India cannot look the other way. It has to do something," pleaded Mohammed Latheef, founder president of the fledgling Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP), speaking to IANS over the telephone from Colombo.

"It is as if the army has taken over the country and society is being brutalised," added Latheef, who lives in self-imposed exile in Sri Lanka.

His party has an office in Colombo because no political group is allowed to function in the Maldives, an Indian atoll nation that President Maumoon

Abdul Gayoom has ruled since 1978.

He said all his three children had been assaulted and taken into custody because of his opposition to the government.

Latheef said that Ibrahim Hussain Zaki, a former tourism minister and former secretary general of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (Saarc), and former attorney general Muhammad Munavar were among some 300 people jailed in a crackdown.

President Gayoom imposed emergency on Friday "to prevent deterioration of law and order" following two days of street protests in the capital Male.

The protestors, numbering hundreds, demanded constitutional reforms and release of political prisoners.



PHOTO: AFP
Maldivian National Security Service (NSS) personnel disperse demonstrators in Male in the picture taken on August 13. Normalcy is returning to the Maldivian capital after the unrest, which led to the arrest of some 300 political dissidents.

REACTION TO TUTSI MASSACRE Burundi army threatens to enter Congo

REUTERS, Bujumbura

The Burundi army said yesterday it might cross into neighbouring Congo to pursue rebels and militia it blames for massacring 160 Congolese Tutsi refugees at a camp in western Burundi.

The head of Burundi's army, Brigadier-General Germain Niyoyankana, said the military was prepared to move into Democratic Republic of Congo if the Kinshasa government failed to disarm the rebels and allied militia.

"We must avoid a new attack from Congo so the Burundi army does not rule out an offensive in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Everything depends on the Congolese government," Niyoyankana told reporters.

The Burundi army blames the rebel Hutu Forces for National Liberation (FNL), former Rwandan forces and Hutu militia operating in Congo, as well as sections of the Congolese army for Friday's attack.

The FNL, the only rebel group still fighting the Burundian government,

claimed responsibility for the attack in which refugees were burned, hacked and shot to death.

The United Nations said on Tuesday it has suspended peace talks with the FNL for taking part in the massacre, one of the worst in central Africa in years.

The army welcomed the suspension but urged the international community to take stiffer action against the FNL.

"The FNL has proved that it does not want to talk peace. The world must impose sanctions against these people," Niyoyankana said, urging the international community to ensure that the rebels do not get fresh supplies of weapons.

Burundi, which on Sunday closed its border with Congo, is one of six neighboring countries that fought in the DRC during the war but it has since withdrawn.

Rwanda has also said it could be forced to send its forces back into Congo to hunt down rebels it blames for the attack on the refugees.

3 missing as floods wreak havoc in UK

AFP, Boscastle

Three people were missing early yesterday after flash floods tore through a popular coastal tourist area in southwest England, sweeping dozens of cars into the sea and leaving hundreds feared trapped. Three people were unaccounted for after what was described as a wall of water devastated the village of Boscastle, Cornwall, following a torrential rainstorm on Monday afternoon, Devon and Cornwall Police said.

"I want to give an assurance we are doing all we can to substantiate those reports, because there is still an element of confusion with families being split," Superintendent Jon Wotton said.

Up to seven rescue helicopters had battled on Monday evening to rescue people in and around Boscastle after a river in the centre of the village burst its banks, sweeping cars towards the sea and destroying homes.

According to Superintendent Wotton, around six buildings had collapsed due to the force of the water, and an estimated 50 cars had been swept away in the flood.

MUSHARRAF SAYS Pak crackdown sends al-Qaeda scattering

AFP, Islamabad

Top al-Qaeda operatives have fled sanctuaries near Pakistan's border with Afghanistan to cities and other countries after army raids, President Pervez Musharraf was reported saying Tuesday.

Some of them were among the 30 or so suspects rounded up by Pakistani security agencies since mid-July, including a communications expert and a Tanzanian suspect in the 1998 East Africa US embassy bombings.

"Authentic information has revealed these terrorist masterminds were relocating from the mountainous and tribal regions in the north to other cities and even other countries," General Musharraf told state-run Pakistan Television PTV overnight.

"They are desperate. They are trying to move away. They are perhaps trying to relocate elsewhere in the world."

The assaults on al-Qaeda sanctuaries in February and March in South Waziristan, the remotest of seven tribal

districts hugging the porous Afghan border, had sent them scattering.

"Military operations in Wana, Shakai, Santoi and Mantoi villages in South Waziristan have uprooted these terrorists to move away to other cities and countries," he said.

The captures in July of computer whizz Naeem Noor Khan and of Ahmed Khalifan Ghailani, the suspect in the Kenya and Tanzania bombings of US embassies in 1998, yielded a massive trove of information on Osama bin Laden's network.

This in turn led to the uncovering of fresh terror plots in Britain, Pakistan and the US, new terror alerts in US cities and the arrests of 12 al-Qaeda suspects in Britain including major operative Abu Eisa al-Hindi.

Musharraf traced the al-Qaeda planners' presence in Pakistan back to the US-led military campaign to oust Afghanistan's Taliban regime in late 2001.



PHOTO: AFP
Rescue workers evacuate residents from the village of Boscastle in Cornwall, England, by helicopter during flash flooding on Monday. Hundreds of people were feared trapped in southwest England after flash floods left the popular coastal tourist village of Boscastle under water and swept dozens of cars and caravans into the sea.

Cops try to quell riot over flood aid in Bihar: 2 die

AFP, New Delhi

At least two people died Monday as police fired on villagers who accused the government of not supplying aid to cope with deadly floods in the eastern Indian state of Bihar, police said.

Riot police opened fire on some 500 villagers who ransacked a railway station and threw stones at relief officials in Lohna village in Bihar's flood-hit Darbhanga district, said A.N. Jha, spokesman of the Railway Protection Force.

There were conflicting reports on the toll.

Jha said four villagers and a relief official died and that over 24 villagers were injured in the stampede for supplies and police firing.

But local police chief Sunil Kumar said only two people had died in the melee.

Kumar said state officials were distributing food and other items to flood victims at the Lohna railroad station when they were attacked.

Bush announces plan for troop realignment

Democrats blast redeployment, 2 divisions to leave Germany while 70,000 soldiers will back home

AP, AFP, Washington

Two US Army divisions will leave Cold War-era bases in Germany over the next decade, and the US military will increase its presence in former Warsaw Pact countries under President Bush's reorganisation of forces abroad. Bush announced the plan Monday and said the realignment ultimately would bring up to 70,000 troops plus about 100,000 family members and civilian workers back to the United States. Major shifts would not begin before 2006.

More than 200,000 US troops are now stationed overseas, most of them in Europe.

Pentagon officials said the realignment also would close scores of US installations in Europe to consolidate forces at larger bases there. At the same time, the United States would make greater use of training and logistics bases

on the soil of new allies like Uzbekistan, Poland and Romania, said three top Pentagon officials who briefed reporters on condition of anonymity.

The moves are meant to provide greater flexibility and quicker reaction to deal with the smaller engagements that Pentagon planners foresee during the war on terrorism and beyond. And they will move some troops closer to the Middle East and Central Asia.

On a visit to Washington last month, Romanian prime minister Adrian Nastase said he had offered Bush "a five-star location for military bases." Romania, which joined Nato this year, has airstrips and naval bases on the Black Sea, such as one at Constanta, Romania, within striking distance of Iraq and Central Asia.

US Democrats Monday blasted President George W. Bush's plan to

bring home up to 70,000 troops from Europe and Asia, calling it dangerous, ill-conceived and a ploy to boost his bid for re-election.

Bush's announcement quickly drew scathing criticism from former Nato commander Wesley Clark and ex-ambassador Richard Holbrooke, two senior advisers of Democratic presidential candidate John Kerry.

Clark said the 10-year plan, unveiled by the Republican Bush in a campaign speech to US veterans in Ohio, would "significantly undermine US national security."

"As we face a global war on terror with al-Qaeda active in more than 60 countries, now is not the time to pull back our forces, and I question why President Bush would want to do this now," Clark said in a statement.