

US lawmakers reach deal on intelligence reforms

REUTERS, Washington

US lawmakers on Monday reached a deal on overhauling the nation's spy agencies, ending a month-long wrangle about the Pentagon's power under intelligence reforms proposed after the Sept. 11 attacks.

Resolving the issue clears the way for the House of Representatives and Senate to pass the legislation that creates a new director of national intelligence post, and send the bill to President Bush for his signature.

After last-minute appeals by Bush, House and Senate negotiators said they had agreed on language resolving differences over the military chain of command.

House Armed Services Committee Chairman Duncan Hunter, a California Republican, and Senate Armed Services Committee Chairman John Warner, a Virginia Republican, said they would now support the legislation.

Both Hunter and Warner had objected that a compromise negotiated between the House and Senate could undermine intelligence to battlefield commanders.

'Polls could be spread over a 20-day period'

CIA officials present bleak assessments of Iraq

AFP, Brussels/Washington

Iraq's elections could be spread out over a period of 15-20 days in late January, interim prime minister Iyad Allawi said in a Belgian newspaper interview published yesterday.

"Everyone -- Shias, Sunnis, Christians, Kurds, Turkomans -- should take part in the vote," he was quoted as saying by the daily *Le Soir*, referring to landmark polls planned for January 30.

"For that I think one could envisage elections spread over 15 days, 20 days, with polling on different dates for different provinces... That would allow for adequate security arrangements to be put in place," he added.

The interview was carried out last weekend in Geneva, where the interim Iraqi prime minister was on a private visit.

Asked by the French-language newspaper if he was talking about

holding elections on different dates depending on each province, Allawi replied: "Exactly."

"Currently we think that 14 or 15 of Iraq's 18 provinces are calm," he said, while conceding that the security situation was "bad" in Mosul, the Anbar province, small areas of Baghdad and part of the Diyala province.

A resurgence of violence in Iraq has fueled speculation about whether the interim Iraqi government will be able to stick by the January 30 planned poll date.

US President George W. Bush reaffirmed his backing for the date on Monday, saying after talks with interim Iraqi President Ghazi al-Yawar that: "It is necessary for the Iraqi people to vote on January 30."

Allawi added: "The date of January 30 is fixed. People can express their opinion, that is important. But the elections will take

place," while stressing that the polls were "the start of the democratic process, not the end."

The interim Iraqi leader added that foreign observers would have access to the entire electoral process, to ensure that the ballots are "free and fair."

Meanwhile, the departing CIA station chief in Iraq and another CIA official who visited there recently presented bleak views of the situation in Iraq in classified briefings to their superiors, *The New York Times* said yesterday.

In a classified cable sent in late November, the CIA chief who ended a year-long tour of duty in Iraq, warned that the security situation was likely to get worse, including more violence and sectarian violence unless the Iraqi government asserted authority and built up the economy, said officials familiar with his cable.

Indian House repeals Pota

AFP, New Delhi

India's parliament Monday approved a repeal of a controversial anti-terror law introduced after the September 11 attacks, which critics said had been misused to persecute minorities.

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's government, that came into office on May 22, had promised in its policy roadmap that it would withdraw the Prevention of Terrorism Act (Pota), pushed through parliament by the previous Hindu nationalist government.

In September, Singh's government announced scrapping of the law, which Monday received formal parliamentary approval, the Press Trust of India news agency said.

Singh's government has said the repealed act will be replaced by a new law.

Critics had said the act was abused by officials to settle personal scores. It was also blamed for the persecution of Muslims during sectarian rioting in Gujarat state in 2002, in which at least 2,000 people died.



Pakistan's President Pervez Musharraf (R) walks with British Prime Minister Tony Blair inside 10 Downing Street in London Monday. Musharraf is on a two-day visit to the United Kingdom.

Pakistan, Britain push for uprooting cause of terror

AFP, London

The leaders of Britain and Pakistan agreed Monday that the world could not defeat terrorism by force alone, and that it must move quickly to remove its "root causes" such as poverty and political grievances.

At a press conference with British Prime Minister Tony Blair, Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf stopped short of repeating remarks that the world was "absolutely" less safe because of the way the US-led war on terror was being conducted.

Though Musharraf backed "fighting terrorism head-on militarily," he said there needed to be a "strategic long-term" approach that included the resolution of political disputes and ending poverty and illiteracy.

"I'm very sure that the situation in the world now is ripe for resolution of these political disputes," he

said. In Washington on Saturday, Musharraf said US President George W. Bush had agreed that resolving the Palestinian-Israeli conflict was "the core issue" of the war on terrorism, but a senior White House aide disputed his assessment as going too far.

Blair, who preceded Musharraf to the White House on November 11, expressed "complete" agreement with Musharraf.

"We have got to take every action that we can ... to fight terrorism militarily, but we would be foolish to ignore the causes upon which terrorism preys," such as political disputes, Blair said.

Pakistani journalists said the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and Pakistan's conflict with India over the disputed territory of Kashmir were at the heart of the problem, both of which the two leaders dis-

cussed. Though he declined to go into details of their talks on how to proceed with the Palestinian-Israeli problem, Blair said: "I think the next period of time is absolutely crucial."

"If we don't seize this opportunity now, it may not come for us again."

Britain has expressed optimism following the death last month of Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat, who had been considered by Israel and the United States as an obstacle to reviving peace talks.

Critics worldwide say that US support for Israel and the US-led invasion of Iraq, actively supported by Blair, have stirred Arab and Muslim anger and made the war on terror more difficult.

Bush, backed by Blair, has stressed that spreading democracy through the Middle East would remove problems breeding terrorism.



Former Afghan King Mohammed Zahir Shah (R) Afghan President Hamid Karzai (2R) Former Afghan President Hazrat Sebghatullah Mujadidi (3R), US Vice-President Dick Cheney (2L) and Mrs. Cheney (L) attend a swearing in ceremony for Afghan President Hamid Karzai at The Presidential Palace in Kabul yesterday.

Taliban still not beaten in Afghanistan: US

Karzai sworn in as Afghan president

AFP, Kabul

Top US leaders warned yesterday that extremists still want to take back Afghanistan and promised support for newly sworn-in President Hamid Karzai to beat off the threat.

US Vice President Dick Cheney and Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, in Kabul for the inauguration of Karzai, both warned of the danger from militants in the country.

"The military mission is not over," Rumsfeld told US special forces at Bagram Air Base just north of Kabul. "It is not over, there are still groups, extremists, that would like to take this country back."

He said the Taliban and al-Qaeda wanted to use Afghanistan "as a base for terrorist acts around the world as they did on 9/11. But it isn't going to happen."

Cheney highlighted the same threat when he spoke to troops separately at Bagram, where both US leaders arrived for the inauguration.

"Freedom still has enemies here in Afghanistan," Cheney told US forces "and you are here to make these enemies miserable," he added to cheers.

Karzai, Cheney and Rumsfeld discussed the extremist threat as well as rising drug production in Afghanistan during talks before the inauguration.

The Afghan leader, who won an election in October, played down the threat at a press conference after the talks and also hailed the US role in bringing democracy to the country.

Karzai said the danger was more from individuals rather than groups such as the Taliban.

India, Pakistan hold talks on restoring Kashmir bus service

AFP, New Delhi

Indian and Pakistani officials yesterday held the first of two days of talks to try to restore a long-awaited bus service between the divided zones they control in troubled Kashmir.

"Talks were held in a cordial, constructive, friendly atmosphere," said Jali Abbas Jilani, director general (South Asia) in the Pakistani foreign office, who led a team of five in New Delhi.

"Both sides exchanged their ideas. The outcome will be told to you tomorrow," he said.

An Indian foreign ministry source said: "India is flexible in its approach and wants communication links to be restored as soon as possible."

The talks were expected to focus on the issue of what kind of travel documents bus passengers would have to carry to cross the volatile de facto border, the Line of Control.

Pakistan is said to oppose residents in its area of Kashmir traveling on passports and visas, fearing it would be tantamount to accepting the LoC as a permanent border and the final division of the state which both countries claim in full.

However, the Indian source stressed: "The basic position is that passports will have to be used, maybe along with some other documents."

India's Alok Rawat, joint secretary in the ministry of road transport, who led a nine-person team at the talks, made no comment.

Ohio certifies Bush win by smaller margin

REUTERS, Columbus, Ohio

President Bush carried Ohio by 118,775 votes in last month's election, 17,708 fewer than reported at the time but not enough to change the outcome in the crucial state, officials said on Monday.

John Kerry conceded to Bush the day after the Nov. 2 balloting, saying an analysis showed he could not win Ohio, which provided Bush the final margin of victory and a second term.

Ohio Secretary of State J. Kenneth Blackwell certified the outcome on Monday, based on a county-by-county canvass done under state law in the days since the election. It showed Bush with 2,858,727 or 50.82 percent to 2,739,952, or 48.7 percent, for the Democrat Kerry.

Legal challenges surrounding the vote in Ohio, however, were not over. Presidential candidates for the Green and Libertarian parties said they planned to ask Blackwell for a recount, and at least one other lawsuit challenging the voting procedures was still alive.

Soldiers sue Pentagon over extended Iraq tours

AFP, Washington

Eight US soldiers on Monday sued the Pentagon, claiming the military extended their tours of duty in Iraq although their contracts had expired, their attorneys said.

It is the only known court challenge by active-duty soldiers against the Defence Department's so-called stop-loss policy, said attorney Staughton Lynd.

Seven of the soldiers in the lawsuit have asked to remain anonymous, but one of them, David Qualls, said at a news conference in Washington that the court challenge is over "a question of fairness."

"I enlisted in July 2003. I completed and served that one year," Qualls said. "I feel it is time to let me go back to my wife."

Qualls, 35, signed a "Try One" contract on July 7, 2003, which allows a soldier to serve for one year before deciding whether to extend service. Qualls says no one told him about the stop-loss policy.

Pentagon paperwork said Qualls was on the hook until 2031, when Qualls will be over 60 years old, according to court papers.

Manmohan pledges honourable solution to Naga tribal revolt

AFP, New Delhi

India's premier pledged yesterday to seek "an honourable solution" to the country's longest-running insurgency as he held peace talks with leaders of a northeastern rebel group.

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh held talks lasting nearly an hour with two self-exiled leaders of the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN), the oldest and most powerful of about 30 rebel armies in the revolt-racked northeast.

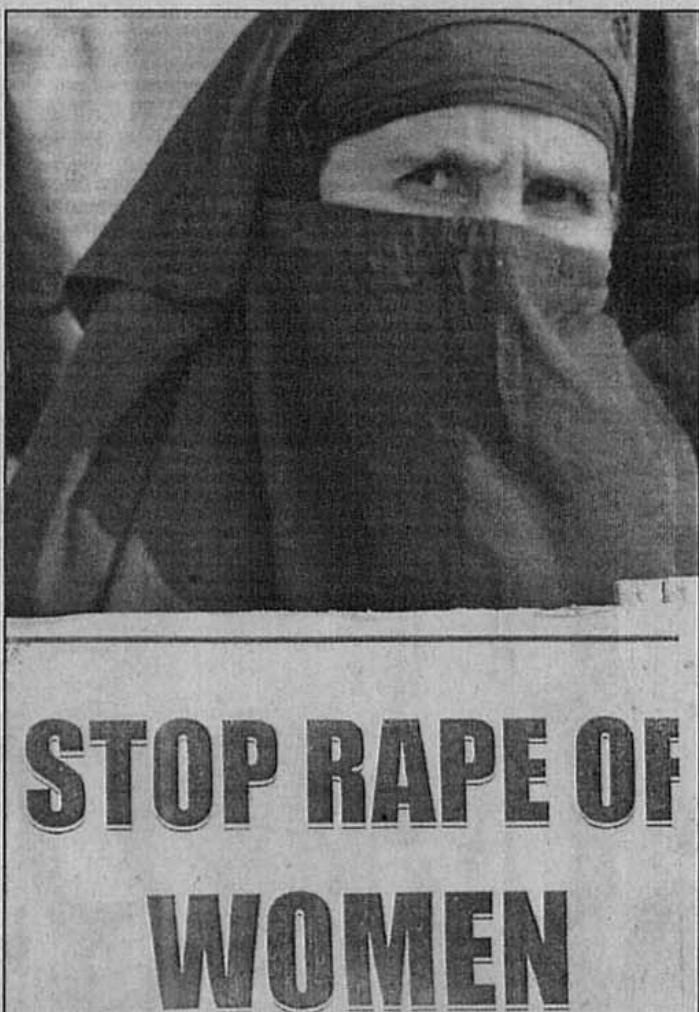
There was no immediate word from either side on when talks

would resume.

"The Naga people have a life of dignity and the government of India is committed to finding an honourable solution to the problems of Nagaland," the prime minister told the rebel leaders, according to a government spokesman.

Naga spokesman Kraibo Chawang said earlier that the group was "very optimistic the talks this time on Indian soil will move forward and take a definite shape."

NSCN Chairman Isak Chishi Swu and General Secretary Thuingaleng Muivah, who arrived last week from Bangkok, have been operating from Southeast Asia for the past 37 years.



An Indian Kashmiri woman holds a sign during a day-long hunger strike by moderate separatists in Srinagar yesterday. Moderate separatists in Indian-administered Kashmir have started a day-long fast to protest alleged human rights abuses by Indian troops, police and witnesses said.

বাংলাদেশ ডায়ালগিক সমিতি
১/১ ইব্রাহিম সরণি, সেগুন বাগিচা, ঢাকা ১০০০
ফোন : ৭১৬০২১৩, ৯৫৬৫৭৬০

আজীবন সদস্যদের 'মেম্বরশীপ কার্ড'

তাসদিক বিস্তারিত

বাংলাদেশ ডায়ালগিক সমিতির ন্যাশনাল কাউন্সিলের সিদ্ধান্ত অনুযায়ী বাডাস-এর সম্মানিত আজীবন সদস্যদের হবিসহ 'মেম্বরশীপ কার্ড' প্রদানের উদ্যোগ নেয়া হয়েছে। সে লক্ষ্যে ২০ নভেম্বর ২০০৪-এর মধ্যে হবি ও বর্তমান ঠিকানা চেয়ে সকল সম্মানিত সদস্যের বাডাস রেকর্ডে সংরক্ষিত ঠিকানায় চিঠি পাঠানো হয়েছিল। পরবর্তী সময়ে ২২ ও ২৩ নভেম্বর ২০০৪-এ দৈনিক পত্রিকার মাধ্যমেও বাডাস-এর আজীবন সদস্যদের মেম্বরশীপ কার্ড প্রদানের জন্য হবি ও বর্তমান ঠিকানা ৬ ডিসেম্বরের মধ্যে পাঠানোর জন্য অনুরোধ করা হয়েছিল। যারা এখনো 'মেম্বরশীপ কার্ড'-এর জন্য হবি ও বর্তমান ঠিকানা পাঠাতে পারেননি তাদেরকে আগামী ১৫ ডিসেম্বর ২০০৪ তারিখের মধ্যে ওপরের ঠিকানায় তা পাঠানোর জন্য শেষবারের মতো তাগিদ প্রদান করা যাচ্ছে।

উল্লেখ্য, এবার থেকে প্রতি বছর বার্ষিক সাধারণ সভায় বাডাস জাতীয় পরিষদের নির্বাচন অনুষ্ঠিত হবে। তাই এবছর থেকে 'মেম্বরশীপ' কার্ডের মাধ্যমে সম্মানিত আজীবন সদস্যদের পরিচয় নিশ্চিত করে ভোট প্রদান করতে হবে।

এমতাবস্থায় আগামী ৪৬তম বার্ষিক সাধারণ সভা ও নির্বাচনে সম্মানিত আজীবন সদস্যদের অংশগ্রহণ ও ভোট প্রদান নিশ্চিত করার জন্য নির্ধারিত সময়ের মধ্যে হবি ও বর্তমান ঠিকানা বাডাস সচিবালয়ের ওপরের ঠিকানায় পাঠানোর জন্য সম্মানিত সদস্যদেরকে বিশেষভাবে অনুরোধ করা হলো।

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