

US soldiers grill Rumsfeld over Iraq safety

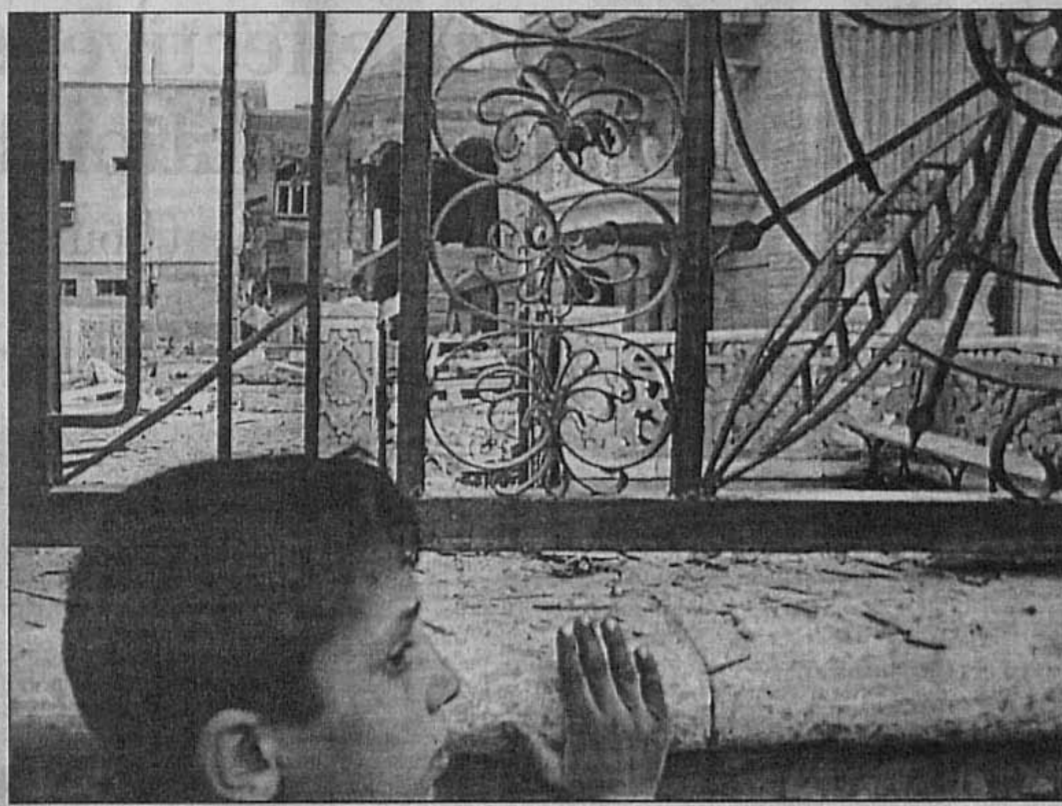
Disgruntled American troops waiting in the Kuwaiti desert to go into Iraq on Wednesday challenged US Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld about their safety and how long they would be in the country.

Rumsfeld flew to Camp Buehring 20 kilometres (13 miles) from Iraq border, to face one of the toughest questions and answer sessions with troops since the start of the Iraq war in March 2003.

"Our soldiers have been fighting in Iraq for coming up to three years, a lot of us are getting ready to move north pretty soon," said one soldier, who was cheered by the some 2,000 troops gathered in a hangar to hear from the US defence chief.

"Our vehicles are not armoured. We are digging up pieces of rusting scrap metal and compromised ballistic glass that has already been shot up, dropped, busted, taking the best for our vehicles to take into combat," he said.

Rumsfeld was also questioned by other troops about what would happen to the US force in Iraq after the planned January 30 election, about missing pay, and other worries over conditions.



An Iraq boy looks at the destruction at a church following an attack on Tuesday in the Iraqi northern city of Mosul. Two churches in Mosul came under simultaneous attack today, witnesses and clerics said, but there were no immediate reports of casualties. Gunmen stormed into the city's Chaldean and Armenian churches in the latest attacks on Iraq's minority Christian community.

India, Pakistan to resume talks on Kashmir bus

The two-day Indo-Pakistan talks on starting a bus service between Srinagar and Muzaffarabad concluded on Wednesday.

There was no official comment on the discussions between the two sides, but it is learnt that they have agreed to meet later on resuming discussions.

At the discussions on Tuesday, India proposed the use of entry permits along with passports by the passengers.

However, Pakistan did not agree with the proposal and insisted on use of state subject certificate as travel document.

While India favoured use of the bus service by all Indians, Pakistan insisted that it should be exclusively for the Kashmiris from both sides.

The five-member Pakistani delegation, headed by Director General (South Asia) in Foreign Office Jilal Abbas Jilani.

Putin questions Iraq polls plan

Violence continues, US combat deaths near 1,000

Russian President Vladimir Putin cast doubt about the viability of holding elections as planned next month in an Iraq under "total occupation", as the number of US soldiers killed in combat neared 1,000.

In the latest violence, assailants targeted the country's minority Christians by setting off explosions in two churches -- one of them Chaldean, the other Armenian -- in the northern city of Mosul, but without causing casualties.

"Each attack against a church pushes Christians to emigrate," said Faid Touma Hermez of the Chaldean Democratic Union. The insurgents want to erase any trace of the Christian presence in Iraq.

In Baghdad, one US soldier died after his patrol was ambushed, the military said.

A total of 999 US military personnel have now been killed in action in Iraq since the US-led invasion of the country in March 2003, according to Pentagon statistics.

In other violence, an Iraqi entrepreneur working for US forces was shot dead in his car near an American base in Samarra, north of the capital, police said. Some 40 such killings have been carried out in the region over two months.

"I cannot imagine how elections can be organized in conditions of total occupation of the country by foreign troops," Putin said as he met Iraqi Prime Minister Iyad Allawi at the Kremlin.

But US President George W. Bush, visiting a marine base at Camp Pendleton, California, promised that voting "will proceed as planned" with heightened US troop levels. He declined to say when US forces would leave Iraq.

General John Abizaid, commander of US forces in the Gulf, said American troops in Iraq could have a different role overall after the elections, as their focus could shift away from combat and toward training Iraqi forces.

"If the Iraqi security forces start to get in terms of leadership and seasoning in important areas around the country -- which I think will happen -- then we can talk about reshaping our forces," he told the Washington Post.

Ukraine MPs change electoral laws

Doctors say opposition leader was poisoned

Ukraine's parliament overwhelmingly passed a bill to weaken presidential powers and change electoral law, breaking an impasse between outgoing President Leonid Kuchma and the opposition.

"This is an act of consolidation and reconciliation that proves Ukraine is united and indivisible," parliament speaker Volodymyr Ltvyn said right after the historic vote.

Ukraine's parliament voted to dismiss the central election commission as part of a compromise between outgoing President Leonid Kuchma and the opposition aimed at diffusing a weeks-long political crisis.

Deputies were due to choose a new 15-member commission later in the day. A new central election commission was a key demand of the opposition in its weeks-old standoff with Kuchma.

Meanwhile a British daily reported, quoting the doctor who oversaw his treatment that Ukraine's opposition leader Viktor Yushchenko was poisoned in an attempt to kill him during election campaigning in September.

Doctors at Vienna's Rudolf-ineherhaus clinic are within days of identifying the substance that left Yushchenko's face disfigured with cysts and lesions, Doctor Nikolai Korpan was quoted as telling The Times in a telephone interview.

Specialists in Britain, the United States and France had helped to establish that it was a biological agent, a chemical agent or, most likely, a rare poison that struck him down in the run-up to the presidential election, he said.

Doctors needed to examine Yushchenko again at the clinic in Vienna to confirm their diagnosis but were in no doubt that the sub-

stance was administered deliberately, he was quoted as saying.

"This is no longer a question for discussion," Doctor Korpan said. "We are now sure that we can confirm which substance caused this illness. He received this substance from other people who had a specific aim."

Asked if the aim had been to kill him, Korpan said: "Yes, of course."

Proof that Yushchenko was deliberately poisoned would be a devastating blow for his rival, the prime minister, Viktor Yanukovich, as the two candidates prepare for a repeat of a presidential run-off on December 26, The Times said.

It would raise questions about whether the poisoning was ordered by Yanukovich, his allies, or even the Kremlin, which fears that Yushchenko will take Ukraine out of its sphere of influence by joining the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and the European Union, it said.

US bridges gaps with Russia

The US State Department moved to minimize differences with Russia over Ukraine and Iraq, saying that relations between Washington and Moscow were "outstanding" after the two countries clashed at the OSCE international security body over the issues with Cold War-style rhetoric.

"The United States and Russia have an outstanding relationship," said State Department spokesman Adam Ereli, pointing out that these relations were "broad, complex, intricate."

He said US President George W. Bush and his Russian counterpart, Vladimir Putin, "can find common understanding and cooperation on a whole host of matters, whether it be arms reduction, whether it be counter-proliferation, whether it be the global war on terror, whether it be other regional issues."

"There are also, as in any relationship, issues where we see things differently," Ereli continued, noting that this also was "the mark of a mature, nuanced, sophisticated relationship."

Palestinian leaders in Beirut on historic visit

Palestinian leaders arrived in Beirut Wednesday on the first such first to Lebanon in more than two decades, following a similar fence-mending trip to powerful neighbor Syria.

Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) chief Mahmud Abbas and prime minister Ahmed Qorei immediately went to lay wreaths at a Palestinian refugee camp cemetery south of Beirut.

Dozens of flag-waving refugees greeted them at Shatila, one of two camps where massacres took place during the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon.

They are expected to meet later with President Emile Lahoud, parliament speaker Nabih Berri and Prime Minister Omar Karamah and tour various Palestinian refugee camps in Beirut and southern Lebanon.



Palestinian Liberation Organization chairman Mahmud Abbas shakes hands with a Palestinian boy, as Lebanese Foreign Minister Mahmud Hammud (R) looks on, during a visit to a cemetery in the Shatila refugee camp south of Beirut yesterday.

Pakistan test-fires nuke-capable missile

Missile test does not violate confidence-building with India: Musharraf

Pakistan on Wednesday test-fired a medium range ballistic missile capable of carrying a nuclear warhead but insisted it was not sending a signal to India amid continuing peace moves with its regional rival.

The Hatf-IV (Shaheen-1) missile, which can hit targets up to 700 kilometers (437 miles) away, was launched from an undisclosed location, a military spokesman told AFP.

The test was Pakistan's sixth this year and the second in 10 days. Pakistan and India, who carried out tit-for-tat nuclear detonations in 1998, both conduct regular missile launches.

Foreign office spokesman Masood Khan said the test was not meant to send any message to India.

The two countries are engaged in a peace dialogue aimed at resolving all issues including the disputed Himalayan state of Kashmir.

"It is not a signal to India. Maintaining our nuclear deterrence is a national priority," Khan said. "Such tests are conducted periodically to validate technical parameters of our missile tests."

Pakistan had informed its neighbors before launching the indigenously developed missile, the military said, adding that the test was "successful".

The test was to validate "additional technical parameters" of the missile, which is already part of Pakistan's military inventory.

Pakistan tested a Ghaznavi short-range nuclear-capable missile on

November 29.

Later Pakistan's President Pervez Musharraf said in Paris that test-firing of a medium range missile capable of carrying a nuclear warhead does not contradict its policy of rapprochement with India.

"We know they are a nuclear power and they know we are. We inform each other when there are missile tests. There is no violation of our confidence-building measures," Musharraf said at a briefing with journalists.

"Pakistan's policy is based on minimum defensive deterrence. When they (India) went nuclear, we went nuclear. When they started producing missiles, we did. We believe in maintaining our dignity and national sovereignty," he said.

Hold Iraq death probe, Blair told

Forty-six eminent figures including military men, ex-diplomats and bishops have written to Tony Blair urging an inquiry into civilian deaths in Iraq. It comes after a study in medical journal the Lancet said nearly 100,000 died following the invasion.

The study, by US and Iraqi researchers, suggested the risk of violent death was higher after the war than before. UK ministers rejected October's Lancet figures, but have offered no alternative estimate of their own.

The letter's publication marks the launch of a new campaign by health charity Medact and the Iraq Body Count project.

Names on the letter include retired General Sir Hugh Beech, the Bishop of Coventry, and an ex-ambassador to Iraq.

The signatories urge the prime minister to set up an independent inquiry to establish just how many

people have been killed or injured in Iraq along with reasons for the casualties.

Lord Garden told BBC Radio 4's Today programme: "We have taken it [Iraq] over and we are going to try and make it a democratic country."

"If we appear to be discarding the people there and saying they are not really important we are going to lose that battle."

The letter to Mr Blair says: "As you know, your government is obliged under international humanitarian law to protect the civilian population during military operations in Iraq, and you have consistently promised to do so."

"However, without counting the dead and injured, no-one can know whether Britain and its coalition partners are meeting these obligations."

The letter's publication marks the launch of a new campaign by health charity Medact and the Iraq Body Count project challenging the government to count casualties.

30 injured in grenade blast in Kashmir

Islamic militants injured 30 people in a grenade attack in revolt-hit Indian Kashmir Wednesday as President Abdul Kalam visited the Himalayan region, police said.

Two hours after Kalam arrived in Kashmir on a one-day visit, rebels hurled a grenade at a security patrol in the busy commercial heart of Anantag, south of the main city, Srinagar, wounding 30 people, police said.

Most of the injured in the attack were civilians, police said. Two victims were in critical condition.

"The blast caused chaos in the area, we've sealed it off," a police official told AFP by telephone from Anantag, 50 kilometers (30 miles) from Srinagar.

Earlier, two militants were killed in northern Baramulla district in a pre-dawn firefight with security forces.

Tight security surrounded Kalam's visit to Kashmir where he flew to address troops in Kargil, high in the Himalayas, that was the scene of a bloody two-month confrontation between Indian troops and Pakistani-backed invaders in 1999.



In this picture taken on November 18 this year, Hindu religious leader Jayendra Saraswathi (C) arrives for the afternoon session at the Judicial Magistrates Court in the city of Kanchipuram, some 80kms southwest of Madras.

Indian Hindu leader Shankaracharya denied bail

A court in south India Wednesday denied bail to a revered Hindu priest accused of involvement in the murder of an aide who questioned the financial records of a sacred temple in Tamil Nadu state.

Judge R. Balasubramanian of Madras high court, denying bail to Jayendra Saraswathi, Shankaracharya of Kanchi cited a law banning bail to any person when there were reasonable grounds to believe they could be guilty of offences punishable by death or a life sentence.

Saraswathi, 71, and the head of a 2,500-year-old temple at Kanchipuram in Tamil Nadu, is the most powerful of Hinduism's four main leaders. He was arrested last month over the death of Thiru Sankararaman, 52, once a close aide but later a sharp critic.

Saraswathi has since remained in judicial custody on suspicion of murder, criminal conspiracy and suppression of evidence over the death of Sankararaman in September. He has not been for-

mally charged.

This was the second time the court denied a bail plea.

The detention of Saraswathi following his arrest on November 11 has enraged Hindu activists who have staged nationwide protests.

His case has been taken up in New Delhi by the opposition Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party, which has staged protests near parliament.

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh has also written to the chief minister of Tamil Nadu, Jayaram Jayalalitha, asking her to ensure the investigations against a "person of his eminence" are conducted "with extreme care and consideration."

Media reports say Sankararaman had alleged financial irregularities at the spiritual institution headed by Saraswathi that controls assets worth more than 50 billion rupees (1.14 billion dollars).

Jayalalitha has said police had "shocking but solid" evidence to prove the cleric's direct involvement in Sankararaman's murder. Police have said the aide was stabbed to death by killers hired for money.

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh
 Local Government Engineering Department
 Office of the Executive Engineer
 District: Munshiganj

Rural Transport Improvement Project (RTIP)
Invitation for Bids (IFB)
 IFB No. 19/FY 2004-2005

Memo No. LGED/Mun.XEN/RTIP-05/2004/2770 Date: 29-11-2004

- The People's Republic of Bangladesh has received a Credit from the International Development Association (hereinafter referred to as the IDA) towards the cost of the Rural Transport Improvement Project (RTIP) and intends to apply part of the funds to cover eligible payments under the Contract(s) as mentioned in para-2. Bidding is open to all bidders from eligible source countries as defined in the guidelines: Procurement under IBRD Loans and IDA Credits.
- The Local Government Engineering Department (LGED), Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, represented by the Executive Engineer, LGED, District: Munshiganj invites sealed bids from eligible bidders for the construction and completion of the following works.

Name of the work	Contract package no.	Bid security (Tk.)	Time for completion (days)	Price of bidding document (Tk.)
Improvement of Chander Bazar-Subachani Road under Tongbari Upazila (Chainage 0+000 to 3+350= 3.350 km)	Mun/UR-32	2,00,000.00	550	2,000.00
Improvement of Masadgaon-Kahetara-Nagerhat Road under Lauhajang Upazila (Chainage 1+780 to 4+490=2.710 km)	Mun/UR-33	1,60,000.00	550	2,000.00
Improvement of Bakultala-Banglabazar Road under Sadar Upazila (Chainage 0+000 to 3+720=3.720 km)	Mun/UR-34	2,50,000.00	550	3,000.00

- The bidders may inspect the bidding documents, obtain further information and clarification at the office of the Executive Engineer, LGED, District: Munshiganj, Tel: 0691-63038 or the Office of the Project Director, RDP-26, LGED Bhaban (Level-5), Agargaon, Sher-e-Bangla Nagar, Dhaka-1207 Tel: 9122435, 8152579. The bidder must be eligible in post-qualification as specified in bidding documents.
- A pre-bid conference will be held on 29-12-2004 at 12.00 Noon in the office of the undersigned and all bidders are requested to attend the conference on time.
- A complete set of bidding documents may be purchased by any eligible bidder from the office of the Project Director [Address: LGED Bhaban (Level-5), Agargaon, Sher-e-Bangla Nagar, Dhaka-1207] or the Deputy Commissioner, District: Munshiganj or the Superintendent of Police, District: Munshiganj or the Upazila Engineer, Upazila: Munshiganj Sadar, District: Munshiganj or the undersigned on submission of a written application upon the payment of a non-refundable fee as mentioned in para-2 for each set in the form of Pay Order/Bank Draft from any scheduled Bank in Bangladesh drawn in favour of the Executive Engineer, LGED, District: Munshiganj. Additional sets of bidding documents may be purchased at the same price. The bidding documents will be available during office hours from 14/12/2004 to 10/01/2005.
- All bids must be accompanied by a bid security of amount as mentioned in table, para-2, in the form of Bank Draft/Pay Order/Demand Draft/Bank Guarantee drawn in favour of the Executive Engineer, LGED, District: Munshiganj.
- All bids must be delivered to the office of the Deputy Commissioner, District: Munshiganj or the Superintendent of Police, District: Munshiganj or the Upazila Engineer, Upazila: Munshiganj Sadar, District: Munshiganj or the undersigned on or before 1.00 PM of 11/01/2005.
- Bids will be opened at 2.00 PM on 11/01/2005 at the office of the undersigned in presence of the bidders or their authorized representatives who choose to attend.
- Bidders may deliver/submit bids personally or by registered mail or by courier services, etc and bids must reach to the office(s) mentioned at para-7 on or before 1.00 PM of 11/01/2005.
- A general information regarding the bidding will be available at the LGED Web Site (<http://www.lged.org>).
- The authority reserves the right to accept or reject any or all bids without assigning any reason.

Executive Engineer
 LGED, Munshiganj.

DFP-28931-2/12/04
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