

## Over 4,000 Iraqis killed in violence this year

### 37pc of civilians slain by foreign forces

AFP, Baghdad

More than 4,000 Iraqis have been killed since the start of the year, half of them civilians, official figures said as legislators struggled to reach agreement on a draft constitution by today.

The bloodiest months were May and July, coinciding respectively with the setting up of the new government and the start of constitutional talks, according to figures released Sunday by the defence, interior and health ministries.

Since January, 2,072 civilians were killed in politically-motivated acts of violence, along with 308 Iraqi soldiers and 765 policemen.

A total of 434 civilians, 150 policemen and 88 soldiers were killed in May, and 412 civilians, 134 police-

men and 45 soldiers in July.

In addition, 855 insurgents have been killed since the start of the year.

The US deaths brought the total number of US military personnel who have died in Iraq since the March 2003 invasion to 1,793 according to an AFP tally based on Pentagon figures.

Earlier this month, a study by two British groups -- Iraq Body Count and the Oxford Research Group -- had put the number of Iraqi civilians killed since US forces invaded the country at about 25,000.

The estimate of 24,865 deaths covered a two-year period between March 2003 and March 2005.

This toll was considerably lower than that of 98,000 suggested in a study published last October by

British-based medical journal The Lancet.

The Iraq Body Count-Oxford Research report attributed 37 percent of civilian deaths to foreign forces and nine percent to insurgents.

However, a further 11 percent of deaths were attributed to "unknown agents," meaning suicide bombs and other attacks not directly aimed at foreign or official Iraqi targets, but possibly still intended to destabilise society.

The report also highlighted "extraordinary" levels of criminal violence, recording almost 9,000 deaths -- more than a third of the total -- not directly related to the occupation and insurgency.

### Blasts kill 5 GIs, 7 Iraqis

AP, REUTERS, Baghdad

Five US soldiers were killed by roadside bombs in two separate incidents in Baghdad while seven Iraqis were killed in another bomb blast, the US military said yesterday.

In the first attack Saturday around 1:40 p.m., a patrol hit a roadside bomb in the southern Dora neighbourhood, killing a soldier from Task Force Baghdad, a statement said. Two others were wounded in that incident.

Meanwhile, a car bomb exploded at an Iraqi police checkpoint south of Baghdad yesterday, killing seven people and wounding 12, police said.



PHOTO: AFP

Indian commuters waded through a waterlogged street after a torrential downpour in Mumbai yesterday. Torrential rains lashed Mumbai disrupting flights, hampering rescue efforts and bringing more misery as officials said the death toll from the heaviest downpours in the Indian city's history neared 1000.

## US asks Nepali king to restore democracy

### Maoists set free 7 kidnapped officials

PTI, Reuters, Kathmandu

The US has asked King Gyanendra to reconcile with political parties for immediate restoration of multiparty democracy in Nepal.

"It is the Royal Palace's compulsion to reach a compromise with political parties to prove its democratic nature," US Ambassador James F Moriarty said at an interaction programme in eastern Nepal town of Dharan.

"Rather than expecting help from third parties, reconciliation among the legitimate political forces is the

best option to resolve the crisis," the envoy said on Saturday.

Asserting that the US was in favour of restoration of democracy in the Himalayan Kingdom, Moriarty appreciated the seven party alliances' efforts to resolve the current political crisis. He called on "the eighth force"-the Palace to cooperate with the political parties.

He said, though the political parties were not satisfied with the declaration of municipality elections, negotiations must be carried forward to resolve the current stalemate.

He sharply criticised the Maoists

saying "the Maoists are the main obstacle to the democratic process in Nepal."

Meanwhile, Maoist rebels, waging a deadly battle to overthrow the nation's Hindu monarchy, freed seven civil servants yesterday whom they had abducted a day earlier, an official said.

Bijay Nath Poudel, an administrator in the tea-growing district of Ilam, said all the government workers, who were kidnapped from a bus on Saturday in an area about 600 km east of Kathmandu, were released unharmed.

### CPI(M) opposed to Indo-US nuke deal

PTI, New Delhi

Notwithstanding the Prime Minister's statement on Indo-US joint agreement which senior party leaders described as "generally alright", CPI (M) general secretary Prakash Karat yesterday maintained his party had reservations over some contents of the agreement.

Observing that the "the trend of becoming a strategic US ally, started by erstwhile NDA government continues", Karat said the party would focus on "what is harmful in these agreements for our strategic and security interests" and conduct seminars and meetings on the issue.

Karat said the Indo-US Joint Statement issued during the Prime Minister's visit "shows the continuation of the trend of India being accommodated as an ally" of the US.

## Fresh rains compound Mumbai's misery

### Flood toll nears 1,000

REUTERS, AFP, Mumbai

Police urged millions of Mumbai residents to stay at home as heavy rains brought more flooding to India's financial hub yesterday.

Torrential rain lashed Mumbai again yesterday, disrupting flights, hampering rescue efforts and bringing more misery as the death toll from the heaviest downpours in the Indian city's history neared 1,000.

The driving rain disrupted rail and air services, officials said, as the authorities issued new flood alerts and appealed to residents to stay home.

"Heavy to very heavy rainfall accompanied by strong gusty winds

is expected in the city and suburbs. The forecast is valid until Monday morning," a spokesman for the Mumbai Meteorological Department said. "Heavy rainfall is also expected to occur in Maharashtra and neighbouring states during the next 48 hours."

Dead bodies and carcasses of animals were still strewn across parts of Mumbai and its suburbs from last week's flooding, raising fears of disease, TV and officials said.

"I hope there is no epidemic," Maharashtra relief commissioner Krishna Vatsa said.

The monsoon rains in the region have been the heaviest for nearly a

century, and on Sunday western India was drenched again.

"We are appealing to people not to travel unless it is absolutely necessary," Police Commissioner A.N. Roy told Reuters. "Already, the rains are going on and there is a forecast of further heavy rainfall."

Officials said fatalities in the western state of Maharashtra, including Mumbai, were rising as more bodies were being dug out from villages flattened by landslides south of Bombay.

In Raigarh district, 150 km south of Bombay, about 200 are dead or missing. At least 899 confirmed deaths have been reported in the state, police said.



PHOTO: AFP

A representative of Dalit (the Hindu untouchables) communities talks to Congress Party president Sonia Gandhi at her residence in New Delhi Saturday. They expressed their gratitude to Sonia for her positive and sympathetic attitude towards the problems of Indian scheduled castes and tribals.

## London police seeks Muslim recruits

### British govt to consult senior Muslims

AFP, London

London police chiefs are battling to boost stubbornly low numbers of Muslim officers, in a bid to bolster ties with local communities and help fight Islamist terrorists after the recent bombings.

In the famously multicultural British capital, Dal Babu is an exception: the 42-year-old ethnic Indian, a superintendent in the east end district of Bethnal Green, is the only Muslim of his rank in the Metropolitan Police force.

"I joined the Met in 1983. At that time, there was less than one percent officers from ethnic minority. We are at seven percent now, the change has been huge," he told AFP.

He points out that Muslim staff in the Bethnal Green district, which has substantial Bangladeshi and Pakistani communities, have facilities for prayers, can eat halal food and do not have to work Fridays.

"It's important for the Muslim community to have a Muslim senior officer, they see me go to the prayer on Friday, it gives them confidence," he says.

But while welcoming the prog-

ress he also cautions that it must be seen in perspective, pointing out that Bethnal Green police station has only nine Muslim officers among its 1,200 staff.

"There is still much to do," he said.

The under-representation is widespread: out of the 31,000 employees of the Met, only 900 are Muslim.

Meanwhile, Britain's interior ministry is to meet with Muslim community leaders to foster good relations after the London terror bombings, a Home Office spokeswoman said yesterday.

The spokeswoman said eight meetings will take place before parliament returns in October, ending with "concrete proposals" on key issues from Home Secretary Charles Clarke.

"The government is introducing a series of meetings during the summer to discuss the shared challenges facing the Muslim community and the government following recent events," the spokeswoman said.

London has been hit by two sets of bomb attacks blamed on Islamic militants, including one that left 56 people dead on July 7.

## Iran, EU on collision course over nukes

### Britain warns Tehran

AFP, Vienna/London

Iran and the European Union are on a collision course this week over Tehran guaranteeing it is not making nuclear weapons, in the first crisis on this issue since hardliner Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was elected Iranian president in June.

Iran has threatened to resume uranium enrichment activities, a process that makes fuel for civilian nuclear power plants but what can also be the explosive core of atom bombs, and has set a deadline of Monday for EU negotiators Britain, France and Germany to offer a package of incentives to be provided in return for Iran guaranteeing its nuclear program is peaceful.

Iran's outgoing President Mohammad Khatami said last week that the Islamic Republic would resume enrichment activities no matter what the Europeans propose although "we prefer to do it with their agreement."

Ahmadinejad said earlier this month that Iran is "faithful to our international obligations (in nuclear matters) but we will not allow the

Iranian people to be deprived of their rights" to the peaceful use of nuclear energy.

Meanwhile, Britain warned Iran yesterday against making an "unnecessary and damaging step" by resuming key uranium conversion activities, saying they could jeopardise European Union nuclear talks with Tehran.

The British government, which is spearheading the EU-Iran talks along with France and Germany, also said it would make new proposals in a week -- despite a warning from Iran that it wants new plans on Monday.

The Foreign Office said it was seeking "clarification of Iran's intentions" and urged Tehran to avoid any unilateral move which "would make it very difficult to continue" the negotiations with the European Union.

"We have received reports that the Iranians have decided to restart their uranium conversion facility at Isfahan," suspended since last November under an accord struck in Paris with the so-called E3: Britain, France and Germany.

## One war ends, another starts for Londoners

AFP, London

For many Londoners, the Islamist terrorist threat now gripping the city recalls the decades of IRA violence, which blighted the British capital -- but most agree it is much more serious.

Last week's historic Irish Republic Army renunciation of violence was greeted with relief by politicians here, but for ordinary Londoners it was vastly overshadowed by anxiety shrouding the city after the recent attacks.

"It's much more worrying. With the IRA you didn't feel scared every time you got on the tube," said pensioner George Burrows, buying a newspaper at King's Cross, scene of the deadliest July 7 bombing which left 27 dead.

The sense of fear in London -- where yellow fluorescent police jackets are everywhere, and armed officers commonplace -- is fuelled by repeated warnings that further attacks cannot be ruled out despite the wave of arrests last week.

The Sunday Times said a third terror cell was planning multiple suicide bomb attacks against "soft" targets in London like the Underground subway network, left

reeling by the July 7 and July 21 attacks.

After the initial four-pronged terrorist threat now gripping the city, much was made of the fact that Londoners were not new to terrorism.

For years during Northern Ireland's "Troubles" lasting more than three decades, London got used to the regular blows of IRA attacks, including most notoriously the near-killing of prime minister Margaret Thatcher in Brighton in 1984.

But the July 21 attacks changed the mood here, underlining both that the bombings were not a one-off but above all that even a vast police presence could not prevent an alarmingly organised assault at the heart of the capital.

"A nightmare ends, another nightmare begins," said the Guardian daily after the IRA statement last Thursday. "It was if one flag was lowered while another was raised," said Jonathan Friedland in a front-page commentary.

The differences between the IRA terror threat and the latest bombings, claimed by offshoots of Osama bin Laden's al-Qaeda network, are legion.

## Black teen killed in axe attack in UK

AP, Liverpool

A black teenager who was followed through a park by a group of men shouting racist taunts died Saturday after an attacker embedded an axe in his skull.

Anthony Walker, 18, was waiting for a bus with his girlfriend and a cousin when a man started shouting racist taunts at them late Friday near Walker's home in Liverpool, police said.

The three left to find another bus stop to avoid any trouble, police said. But a group of three or four men followed them through a park, and Walker's companions saw someone bludgeon him with an axe.

They ran to get help and returned a few minutes later to find him with the axe embedded in his skull, news reports said. Walker died early Saturday.

## N Korean nuke talks struggle to issue joint statement

REUTERS, Beijing

Negotiators at six-party talks on North Korea's nuclear programmes struggled yesterday to thrash out a joint statement of principles that has eluded them for nearly three years.

The tortuous Beijing talks, now into their sixth day, looked set to drag on.

Despite an unprecedented flurry of one-to-one meetings, the main protagonists, Washington and Pyongyang, still appeared far apart on the critical issue of how and when the North's nuclear weapons programs should be dismantled.

Chief negotiators from the two Koreas, China, the United States, Russia and Japan left it to deputies to haggle over the text of the draft statement put forward by China, with the aim of producing a joint document that all parties could sign.