

## 'Sunni Arab province rejects constitution'

### 5 US soldiers killed by bomb

AFP, REUTERS, Baghdad

The Sunni Arab dominated province of Salaheddin has voted by 71 percent against Iraq's draft constitution according to preliminary results reported Sunday by the chief provincial election officer.

"Seventy-one percent of voters in Salaheddin province voted 'no' to the Iraqi constitution," Saleh Khalil Farraj told AFP.

"These are the initial results, they are not final. They must be fine-tuned and we will announce the official figure at 5:00 pm (1400 GMT)," he said.

Eighty-eight percent of all registered voters in Salaheddin had cast ballots, the official added.

In the city of Samarra, 95 percent of voters rejected the draft charter for a

post-Saddam Hussein Iraq, while three percent approved.

Results from all four Sunni-dominated provinces, Diyala, Salaheddin, Al-Anbar and Nineveh, are crucial because the constitution would be rejected if two-thirds of Iraqis vote 'no' in at least three of the country's 18 provinces.

Sunni Arabs dominated Iraq under Saddam's regime even though they comprise only around 20 percent of the population.

Sunnis fear the new constitution will concentrate power in the hands of regions dominated by majority Shiites and Kurds, depriving them of essential oil revenues.

Iraqi officials counted ballots yesterday after a historic vote on a US-backed constitution with the fate of the docu-

ment in the hands of a few provinces where Sunnis may muster enough "No" votes to block it.

A massive security clampdown prevented any serious insurgent attacks on voting day, with only scattered strikes reported around the country after months of Sunni Arab militant bloodshed that has killed thousands.

Rockets woke the powerful residents of Baghdad's Green Zone government compound shortly after dawn but there was no sign of any damage from the three routine strikes, officials said.

Election officials said partial results from the vote could be available as early as Sunday, but that it would take several days for the verdict to become clear.

If the constitution passes Iraq will go to the polls again in December to elect a new, four-year parliament in a step that Washington says will mark its full emergence as a sovereign democracy and new Western ally.

A "No" vote would force the country's warring factions back to the drawing board, limiting December's election to a new interim government to redraft the charter.

Meanwhile, five US soldiers were killed in Iraq on Saturday when their vehicle was hit by an improvised bomb in the western city of Ramadi, the US military said yesterday.

The statement gave no details beyond saying the soldiers were assigned to the 2nd Marine Division.

## 'Russia ready for arms tech transfer to India'

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

Russia yesterday said it was ready to provide India with latest weapons technology and hoped that the two countries would conclude an agreement on military intellectual property right (IPR) by the year-end to pave the way for transfer of military technology.

Asserting that the two countries' defence cooperation has reached an advanced stage of mutual trust, Russian Defence Minister Sergei Ivanov, who arrived here Saturday night on a three-day visit, said Moscow was ready to cooperate with India on co-production of weapons systems and platforms like the fifth generation fighter aircraft, advanced warships and sub-marines.

Talking to reporters, he hoped the pending pact on protection of military IPR between the two countries to safeguard technological know-how would be reached by year-end.



PHOTO: AFP

People watch Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan addressing the Millions More Movement on a giant screen in front of the US Capitol in Washington Saturday. Thousands of African-Americans, young and old, rallied in Washington, frustrated with lingering inequalities in the United States but hopeful that their show of force would mark a first step toward change.

## Polls date fails to break deadlock in Nepal

AFP, Kathmandu

Nepal's political parties are insisting King Gyanendra restores democratic rule suspended for nine months and holds talks before they will agree to take part in elections scheduled for early 2007.

Gyanendra announced the parliamentary elections last Wednesday during a key religious festival in the world's only Hindu kingdom after a

month of street protests by the parties over his decision to sack the government in February and seize absolute power.

The king accused the government of failing to tackle a Maoist rebellion that has killed more than 12,000 people since 1996.

But political parties have rejected the unilateral announcement, seen as an attempt to deflect international pressure to restore democracy and blunt a unilateral three-month ceasefire by Maoist

rebels in early September.

And some doubt that the king intends to return democracy to his people.

"The seven-party alliance will not participate in any kind of election, whether it's municipal or parliamentary, unless the king is sincere about resolving the crisis," acting president of the Nepali Congress (Democratic) Gopal Man Shrestha said.

## Washington to talk Gaza's future Abbas heads for Paris

AFP, Ramallah

Palestinian leader Mahmud Abbas was due in Paris today ahead of a visit to the White House in a bid to try and turn Israel's withdrawal from Gaza into a springboard for resurrecting negotiations to end the conflict.

The visits are part of a five-nation tour by the Palestinian leader, which kicked off over the weekend when Abbas visited Jordan and Egypt. He will also travel to Spain before heading to Washington midweek.

His sorties in Europe and the United States will be the first time Abbas has left the Middle East region since the last Israeli soldiers left the Gaza Strip on September 12 -- a move which the international community hopes will revitalise the ailing peace process.

It will also be Abbas's first visit to France since being elected as head of the Palestinian Authority in January, and the first time he has returned to Paris since November 2004, when he kept vigil at the deathbed of his predecessor Yasser Arafat. During the Paris talks, Abbas will ask that France "continue to play a positive and effective role within the European Union in support of the Palestinian cause and peace process aimed at reaching a true settlement" of the conflict, Palestinian

foreign minister Nasser al-Qidwa told AFP.

"Our relations with France, and particularly with Europe, are very important and we are always trying to strengthen them," added Qidwa, who will accompany the Palestinian leader on his tour.

Abbas is due to hold talks with French President Jacques Chirac on Monday and Foreign Minister Philippe Douste-Blazy on Tuesday. Although France is a traditional ally of the Palestinians, Abbas will also raise Palestinian concerns about the involvement of two French firms in a tramway project which will pass through two settlements in occupied east Jerusalem, the minister said.

Qidwa admitted he was "deeply worried" by the involvement of Alstom and Connex, the transport arm of the French conglomerate Veolia, in the tramway project which he said contravened international law.

On Tuesday, Abbas will hold talks in Madrid with Spanish Prime Minister Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero and Foreign Minister Miguel Angel Moratinos, before arriving in Washington Wednesday ahead of his second meeting with US President George W. Bush since being elected Palestinian leader.

## Five killed in S Thailand violence

AFP, Yala

Five people, including two teenagers and a monk, were killed on Sunday in separate shootings and a suspicious fire at a Buddhist temple in Thailand's restive south, police said.

In the latest attacks, two Buddhist men were shot dead around 2:00 pm in Tak Bai district of Narathiwat province while riding their motorcycle, police said.

"Santi Puiprom, 40, was shot in the head and body and died immediately, while Suthep Sanad, 54, was shot in the head and died on the way to the hospital," Tak Bai district police lieutenant Supachoke Wiwattanasin told AFP.

"Police believe this must have been done by the insurgents."

Earlier Sunday, two teenagers and a monk were killed at a temple in Pattani province's Panarai district that police believe was deliberately torched by suspected Islamic separatists.

The boys appeared to have been shot before the attack, while the monk died after being slashed on the neck at the Promprasith temple, police said.

"About 20 men invaded Wat Promprasith in the early morning around 2:15 am and set fire to the temple and the two monks' dwellings," district police captain Kittipat Sangwisuth told AFP.

## 'Fair trial at risk in Saddam's case'

### 'Tareq Aziz refuses to testify against his ex-boss'

AFP, New York/Baghdad

An international human rights group warned yesterday that the court established to try former Iraqi president Saddam Hussein and his associates runs the risk of violating international standards for fair trials.

Saddam Hussein and seven other former Iraqi officials go on trial Wednesday for crimes that took place in the town of al-Dujail in 1982.

Government security forces allegedly killed more than 140 individuals from al-Dujail in retaliation for an assassination attempt on Saddam Hussein as his motorcade passed through the town located north of Baghdad.

But Human Rights Watch said in a briefing paper that problems with the tribunal and its statute include the absence of any requirement to prove guilt beyond reasonable doubt as well as inadequate protections for the accused.

Also threatening the integrity of the process were disputes among Iraqi political factions over control of the court and requirements that prohibit commutation of death sentences by any Iraqi official and compel execu-

tion of the defendant within 30 days of a final judgment, the group said.

Meanwhile, former Iraqi deputy prime minister Tareq Aziz will not testify against Saddam Hussein in an upcoming trial in exchange for his own freedom, Aziz's lawyer told yesterday.

A report in Britain's Sunday Telegraph had said Aziz was ready to take the stand against Saddam, who is to stand trial on Wednesday for the murder of 143 Shia villages in 1982.

"It's completely false. I have always said that Tareq Aziz never had any intention of testifying against Saddam," said Badie Izzat Aref.

According to the newspaper report which quoted Aref, Aziz would have the main charges against him dropped and would be allowed to live quietly in exile while working on his autobiography.

Aziz has been accused of two counts of mass murder, allegedly committed in 1979 and 1991, and punishable by death if he is found guilty. He denies the charges.

Aref told AFP his client would claim that any orders for repressive operations were issued by Saddam himself.

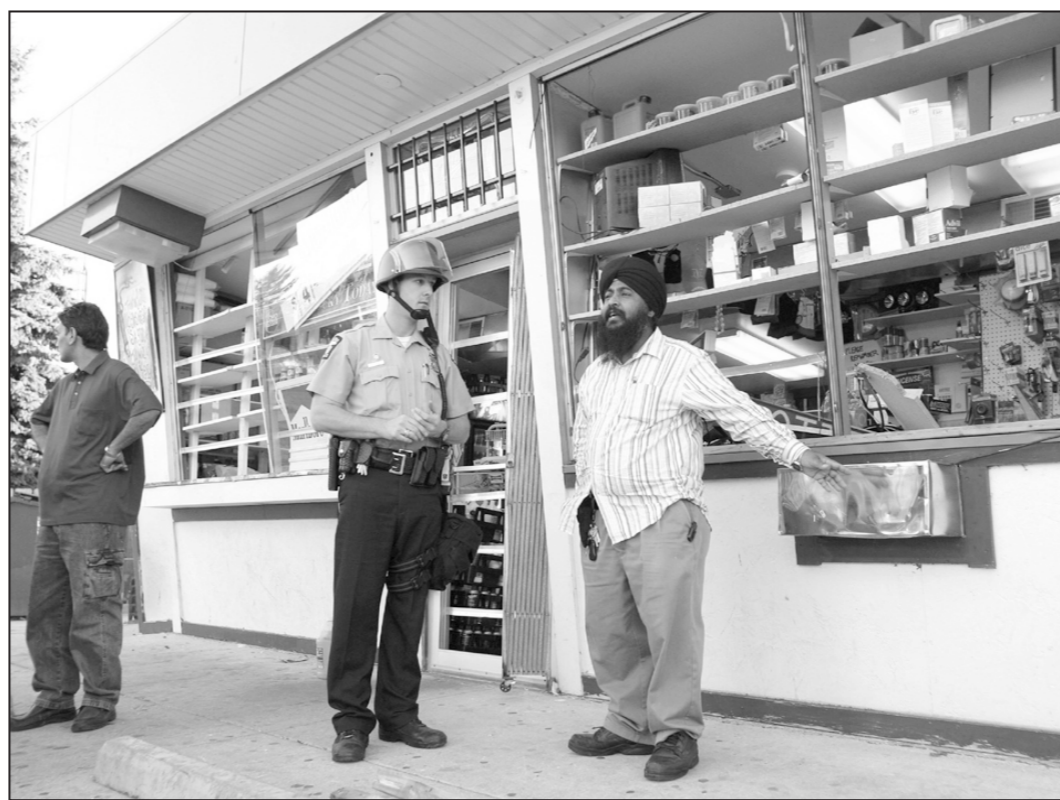


PHOTO: AFP

A man complains to a police officer after his gas station was heavily damaged during a riot Saturday in Toledo, Ohio. Approximately 24 people were arrested after violence erupted in relation to a march of National Socialist Movement members, who call themselves, "America's Nazi Party."

## White supremacists riot in Ohio

AP, Toledo

Protesters at a white supremacists' march threw rocks at police, vandalised vehicles and stores and cursed the mayor for allowing the event.

Mayor Jack Ford said when he and a local minister tried to calm the rioters Saturday, they were cursed and a masked gang member threatened to shoot him. At one point, the crowd reached 600 people, officials said.

Rioters set fire to 86-year-old Louis Ratajski's neighbourhood pub, Jim & Lou's Bar, but he and his nephew escaped the flames.

"To be honest with you, there weren't enough police to take care of them," he said.

At least 65 people were arrested and several police officers were injured before calm was restored about four hours later.

Ford blamed the rioting on gangs taking advantage of a volatile situation. He declared a state of emergency, set an 8 p.m. curfew through the weekend and asked the Highway Patrol for help.

"It's exactly what they wanted,"

Ford said of the group that planned the march, which was cancelled because of the rioting.

At least two dozen members of the National Socialist Movement, which calls itself "America's Nazi Party," had gathered at a city park to march under police protection. Organizers said they were demonstrating against black gangs they said were harassing white residents.

The violence broke out about one-quarter of a mile away along the planned march route shortly before it was to begin. One group of men pounded on a convenience store, and others overturned vehicles. There was a report of a shooting but police hadn't found a victim, Police Chief Mike Navarre said.

About 150 police officers chased bands of young men through the area. Officers wearing gas masks fired tear gas canisters and flash-bang devices designed to stun suspects, but the groups continued throwing rocks and bottles. Several officers and firefighters suffered minor injuries, Navarre said.