

# Iraq probes 'unusually high' yes vote tally

## Adviser to top Sunni politician, 2 US Marines killed in fighting

AP, AFP, Baghdad

Iraq's election commission announced Monday that officials were investigating "unusually high" numbers of "yes" votes in about a dozen provinces during Iraq's landmark referendum on a new constitution, raising questions about irregularities in the balloting.

On Tuesday, insurgents shot and killed an adviser to one of Iraq's top Sunni Arab officials as he drove to work in Baghdad, police said.

Two US Marines were killed in fighting in western Iraq near the Jordanian border, the military said Tuesday.

The Marines died Monday when they were hit by small-arms fire as US forces fought insurgents near the town of Rutba, 370km west of Baghdad, the military said. Four militants were

killed and a small supply of their arms seized, the statement said.

The shooting of Ayed Abdul Ghani occurred in new Baghdad, an eastern section of the capital, at about 7:45 a.m., said police Maj. Falah Al-Mohammedawi.

Meanwhile, word of the review came as Sunni Arab leaders repeated accusations of fraud after initial reports from the provinces suggested the constitution had passed. Among the Sunni allegations are that police took ballot boxes from heavily "no" districts, and that some "yes" areas had more votes than registered voters.

Confusion has surrounded the ballot count since Iraqis voted on the draft constitution Saturday, and election officials announced Monday that the results would be delayed after

unusually high figures were reported.

"The first controls are now taking place," in what would eventually be a nationwide audit, a senior electoral official told AFP on condition of anonymity.

"We are not ruling out technical error or fraud, but for now it is only a question of anomalies."

Problems with initial figures transmitted to the Independent Electoral Commission were found in southern Shia provinces as well as in Kurdish areas in the north, where the numbers of 'yes' votes were very high, the source said.

The Electoral Commission made no mention of fraud, and an official with knowledge of the election process cautioned that it was too early to say whether the unusual numbers were

incorrect or if they would affect the outcome.

But questions about the numbers raised tensions over Saturday's referendum, which has already sharply divided Iraqis. Most of the Shia majority and the Kurds the coalition which controls the government support the charter, while most Sunni Arabs sharply opposed a document they fear will tear Iraq to pieces and leave them weak and out of power.

Irregularities in Shia and Kurdish areas, expected to vote strongly "yes," may not affect the outcome. The main electoral battlegrounds were provinces with mixed populations, two of which went strongly "yes." There were conflicting reports whether those two provinces were among those with questionable figures.



Relatives mourn near the dead body of Kashmiri Education Minister Ghulam Nabi Lone at his residence in Sopore, some 55km north of Srinagar yesterday. Alleged Kashmiri militants gunned down Indian Kashmir's junior education minister and two policemen and a visitor in an attack at his fortified home in Srinagar.

## Thailand extends emergency rule in Muslim south

AFP, Bangkok

Thailand yesterday extended emergency rule in its three mainly Muslim southern provinces by another three months, as the death toll nears 1,000 in nearly 22 months of unrest.

"The cabinet approved the extension of emergency rule in three southern provinces for another three months," General Vinai Phattiyakul, head of the National Security Council, told AFP after the cabinet's weekly meeting.

Cabinet approval of the extension was widely seen as a formality, with Thai Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra publicly saying the controversial emergency measures would be extended several times before the meeting Tuesday.

Thaksin imposed the measures by decree in July but the tough new rules were set to expire on October 20 without approval of the cabinet.

Under emergency rule, authorities can detain suspects for up to 30 days without charge, search and arrest without warrants, and tap phones, among other actions aimed at quelling an Islamic insurgency and other unrest.



Women and men wait in separate lines for quake-relief under Pakistan military security in Malsi, east of Muzaffarabad in the Jhelum Valley yesterday in Pakistan-controlled Kashmir.

## UN SAYS

# Not enough tents in world for survivors

AFP, Islamabad

A senior United Nations official said yesterday there were not enough tents in the world to protect refugees from the coming winter after the October 8 earthquake in South Asia.

Tents are a priority item with around three million people made homeless, many of them forced to live in the open in plummeting temperatures in Pakistan-controlled Kashmir and parts of North West Frontier Province.

"It is fair to say the indication is that there are not enough tents in the world available to support the requirements," Andrew MacLeod, chief operations officer in the UN emergency response centre in Islamabad, told AFP.

The UN said it had already exhausted the supply of the vital items in Pakistan, which is itself the world's biggest producer of so-called winterised tents.

"If there is another emergency in the next few months it will be very difficult. So that is a huge issue right now," UN spokeswoman Amanda Pitt said.

Pitt said it was impossible to give a

definitive figure for the number of tents needed, but said authorities were working on a homeless figure of between 2.8 and 3.2 million and of there being an average five members per family.

She said 37,000 tents had been delivered as of Monday night and the Pakistani government has contributed a further 100,000.

"We know that there are approximately another 150,000 in the pipeline but still we believe that it is not going to be enough," she said.

Relief agencies were scrambling to find warm tents from wherever they could before snows begin to fall on the devastated mountain villages of Kashmir and northern Pakistan, the spokeswoman said.

"They are coming in every which way, but tents are large and heavy so taking them in by helicopter is difficult," Pitt said. "We are trying to get them from everywhere. Neighbouring countries are key... and China, Korea, Singapore, the Middle East, everywhere."

# 4 Afghan cops killed in clash with US troops

## Two killed in US vehicle bombing

AFP, Kandahar

Four Afghan policemen were killed in a mistaken shootout with US troops in southern Afghanistan while two people died when a bomb hit a private US security vehicle yesterday, officials said.

The latest violence in southern Kandahar province comes amid an upsurge in attacks linked to an insurgency launched by militants loyal to the Taliban regime that was removed from power four years ago in a US-led operation.

The Afghan police and US forces were in Kandahar's Maiwand district when unknown attackers opened fire on a district governor's office close to midnight on Monday, an interior ministry spokesman said.

Both sides returned fire and ended up shooting at each other, spokesman Yousuf Stanizai said.

"Due to a misunderstanding, firing started between both sides. The result

of this was that four policemen were killed and one was wounded," he told AFP.

Also in Kandahar province, a bomb tore through a vehicle of private US security firm USPI Tuesday, killing two Afghan employees and wounding three, Stanizai said.

The bomb exploded as the vehicle passed, he said, blaming the attack on the "enemies of Afghanistan", a term Afghan officials use to refer to Taliban militants and their Islamic allies.

Southern Kandahar was the power base of the Taliban government that was ousted after they failed to hand over Osama bin Laden, alleged mastermind of the September 11, 2001 attacks on the United States.

The area, along with other provinces in the south and east, has been the focus of an insurgency by the Taliban who have vowed to overthrow the government of President Hamid Karzai.

More than 1,400 people, most of them militants, have been killed in insurgency-linked violence this year, up from 850 last year.

The attacks in Kandahar include four suicide bombings in less than a month, which only killed three people, besides the attackers.

Three religious leaders have been also been killed in the country in the past few days, all of them members of provincial religious councils that advise the government.

One of the mullahs, Mawlawi Noor Ahmad Jan from eastern Kunar province, had been an outspoken critic of the Taliban.

The militants claimed responsibility for the killing of another, Mawlawi Mohammad Gul from southern Helmand province.

Karzai said in a statement Tuesday he was "deeply disturbed by these crimes, which are attacks on Islam and on the Ulemas (mullahs)."

# No homeland for Tamils

## Lanka PM unveils new peace initiative

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka's prime minister pledged yesterday to launch a new initiative to end decades of ethnic bloodshed but ruled out a homeland for minority Tamils if he wins next month's presidential elections.

Premier Mahinda Rajapakse said he would solve the conflict within a "unitary state," effectively scrapping a deal with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) rebels to share power in a federal set-up.

He also said Norway would no longer hold the key role as peace broker.

"I strongly believe in upholding the civil and human rights of all communities, the nation's sovereignty, security and the unitary character of the state," said the prime minister, launching an 87-page manifesto.

Rajapakse, 59, did not answer reporters' questions after giving copies

of the manifesto to monks and other religious leaders.

But his spokesman Mangala Samaraweera explained the prime minister opposed Tamil Tiger rebel demands for a traditional homeland for the minority and the right to self-determination.

Rajapakse would also review the role of Norway, which acts as a "peace facilitator", and a Norwegian-led truce monitoring mission.

"We all know that the facilitators and the monitors are not doing the job they are supposed to be doing," Samaraweera said, adding they could be replaced or the role of other foreigners enlarged.

Rajapakse's Freedom Alliance had been at loggerheads with Norway since the main opposition United National Party (UNP) entered into an Oslo-brokered truce with Tamil Tiger rebels while in power in February 2002.

The UNP-led government was sacked by President Chandrika Kumaratunga in February 2004 and accused of making too many concessions to the Tigers.

Samaraweera said the premier's peace initiative would involve a cross-section of society if he was returned to power and that he was also hoping to have direct talks with the LTTE.

There was no immediate reaction from the guerrillas.

Rajapakse played down fears that the country could return to war if his party abandoned agreements the previous government had reached with the LTTE to work towards a federal state.

"I am confident that we can achieve peace without returning to war," Rajapakse said. "I intend to begin peace talks with all stake-holders in the conflict to realise this goal."

# US, India sign science, technology pact

AFP, Washington

The United States and India have signed Monday an umbrella science and technology agreement to boost cooperation in areas ranging from health to space technology.

The pact, signed by US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and India's minister of state for science and technology Kapil Sibal, notably nailed down intellectual property rights issues that had snagged negotiations since 1993.

It is aimed at expanding collaboration in basic sciences, space, energy, nanotechnology, health and information technology, according to a fact sheet distributed by the State Department.

The agreement, officials said on Tuesday, would also complement the activities of the Indo-US Science and Technology Forum, established in 2000.

Rice called the pact "another dramatic illustration of the fast-growing bilateral relationship we are building between the United States and India."

Sibal said, "This is indeed a very historic occasion. It is indeed a milestone 15 long years after negotiations."

Relations between the two countries have blossomed in recent years, climaxing with an accord signed by President George W. Bush and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh in July, in which Washington agreed to lift a ban on civilian nuclear technology sales to nuclear armed India.

The United States had placed sanctions on India after its second round of nuclear tests in May 1998, but agreed after the September 11, 2001 attacks to waive those and other sanctions in return for support in the war on terrorism.

# Voting starts in Bihar

## Shoot-on-sight ordered to keep peace

AFP, Patna

Police were told to shoot troublemakers in a security crackdown during polling yesterday for Bihar assembly elections, the second bid this year to break the political deadlock in India's most lawless state.

The orders were issued after unidentified gunmen shot dead a youth in Nawada district, 125km south of the state capital Patna, before voting started, police said.

"Cops have been ordered to shoot-at-sight the troublemakers who attempt to disturb peace," said state director general of police, A.R. Sinha.

Some 90,000 police, paramilitaries and other personnel were deployed to fight vote rigging and violence in the four-phase elections.

Maoist rebels, who stage regular bloody attacks on government officials, called a boycott and threatened to disrupt the polls in all 57 constituencies which voted Tuesday, but there were no further reports of violence by the close of polling.

As in the first election last February,

the election has been staggered to try to keep law and order problems to a minimum in a state infamous for fraud and intimidation.

Policemen in riot gear stood guard as voters queued outside stations in the first phase.

Two senior figures in federal railways minister Laloo Prasad Yadav's regional Rashtriya Janata Dal party were detained for allegedly carrying arms and trying to damage electronic voting machines, police said.

And nine others were detained in the south-western district of Kaimur for trying to disrupt voting.

Problems were reported with electronic voting machines in four of the 12 districts polling Tuesday, election officials said, describing the turnout as "sluggish", which analysts attributed to the heavy security presence.

"At times, the armed forces instead of inculcating confidence among the people deter them from coming to the booths," said P.N. Singh, analyst with the Asian Development Research Institute, a Patna based think-tank.



General Secretary of the Nepal Communist Party-United Marxist and Leninist (NCP-UML), Madhav Kumar Nepal (L) and president of the Nepali Congress (NC), Girija Prasad Koirala addresses the media while attending a tea party hosted by the NCP-UML on the occasion of Bijaya Dashami in Kathmandu yesterday.