

US auditors see Iraq failing to attain goals

AP, Washington

The Iraqi government has failed to meet the vast majority of political and military goals laid out by lawmakers to assess President Bush's Iraq war strategy, congressional auditors have determined.

The Associated Press has learned the Government Accountability Office, or GAO, will report that at least 13 of the 18 benchmarks to measure the surge of US troops to Iraq are unfulfilled ahead of a Sept 15 deadline. That's when Bush is to give a detailed accounting of the situation eight months after he announced the policy, according to three officials familiar with the matter.

The officials, who spoke on condition of anonymity because the report has not been made

public, also said the administration is preparing a case to play down the findings, arguing that Congress ordered the GAO to use unfair, "all or nothing" standards when compiling the document.

The GAO is to give a classified briefing about its findings to lawmakers on Thursday. It is not yet clear when its unclassified report will be released but it is due Sept. 1 amid a series of assessments called for in January legislation that authorised Bush's plan to send 30,000 more troops to Iraq, where there is now a total of more than 160,000 troops.

Among those Bush will hear from are the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Defence Secretary Robert Gates; the commander of US forces in Iraq, Gen David Petraeus; and the US ambassador to Iraq, Ryan Crocker.

The Pentagon said Wednesday Bush was likely to get a variety of views from different military officials. Bush will then deliver his own report to Congress by Sept. 15.

The GAO report comes at a pivotal time in the Iraq debate. So far, Republicans have mostly stood by Bush on the war and staved off Democratic demands of troop withdrawals. But in exchange for their support, many GOP members said they wanted to see substantial progress in Iraq by September or else they would call for a new strategy, including possibly a withdrawal of troops.

Democrats are expected this fall to push for another round of votes on their legislation ordering most troops out by spring. A likely target for the debate will be a \$147 billion bill the military needs to fund the

wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. The money covers the 2007 budget year, which begins Oct. 1.

The GAO, the congressional watchdog, is expected to find that the Iraqis have met only modest security goals for Baghdad and none of the major political aims such as passage of an oil law.

The White House declined to comment on the specific findings of the GAO report, which one official said would put the Iraqi government's success rate at about 20 percent.

"While we've seen progress in some areas, it would not surprise me that the GAO would make this assessment given the difficult congressionally mandated measurement they had to follow," said Gordon Johndroe, spokesman for the National Security Council.

India, Pakistan open talks on Kashmir dam dispute

AFP, New Delhi

India and Pakistan yesterday launched two days of talks in a bid to settle a more than two-decade-old dispute over the construction of a dam in Indian-held Kashmir, a foreign ministry official said.

The dispute dates back to 1984, when India started building the Tulbul dam on Wullar Lake, which is fed by waters of the Jhelum river.

Pakistan objected to the dam's design, saying it violated the provisions of the 1960 Indus Water Treaty that governs the sharing of common river waters, as Islamabad would be deprived of its rightful share from the Jhelum.

Under the treaty, India and Pakistan each have exclusive rights over three of the six common rivers. Islamabad has rights to the Jhelum.

The discussions in New Delhi are part of peace talks launched by the nuclear-armed neighbours in January 2004.

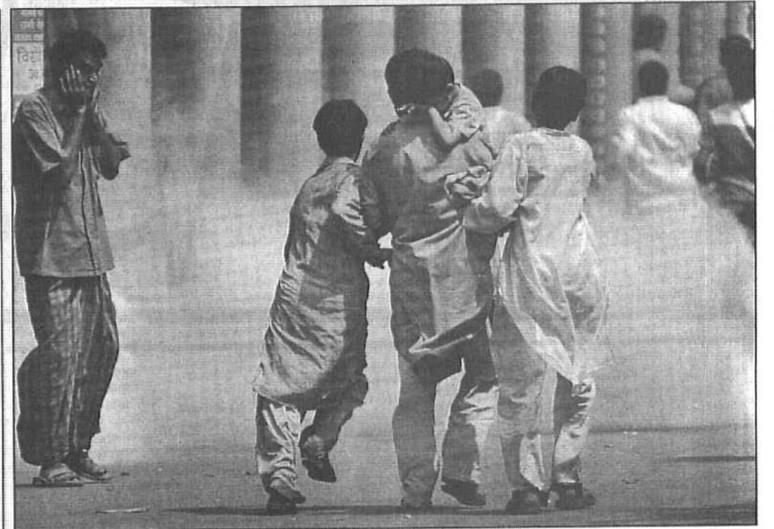


PHOTO: AFP

An Indian man takes his family to shelter amidst clouds of tear gas during a protest in New Delhi yesterday. Protesters damaged buses and burnt vehicles in the Daryaganj area of the Indian capital after an investigation by a local television channel exposed alleged misconduct by a teacher towards female students of a government school.



PHOTO: AFP

A family stands outside their burned house in the village of Xirochori, yesterday. Greece finally tamed the devastating forest fires as the opposition said the country had been "humiliated" by the government's handling of a disaster, which has claimed 63 lives.

Afghan forces kill key Taliban commander

AFP, AP, Kandahar/Kabul

One of the Taliban's most senior commanders, said to be close to the leader of the extremist militia, was killed yesterday in a clash in southern Afghanistan, the defence ministry said.

Also in the south of the country on Thursday, a British soldier and his interpreter were killed while on patrol near the Kandahar airfield, the area's biggest airport, the British defence ministry said.

US-led and Afghan troops battled suspected Taliban insurgents in southern Afghanistan on Tuesday in ground clashes and airstrikes that left over 100 militants dead, the coalition said.

In eastern Afghanistan, a suicide bomber attacked Nato troops helping to build a bridge, killing three American soldiers, a US official said. The official spoke on condition of anonymity because not all families had been notified.

The battle in southern Kandahar province's Shah Wali Kot

district started after the joint force was ambushed by a large group of insurgents who tried to overrun their position several times, before being strafed by airstrikes, the statement from the coalition said.

"Coalition aircraft destroyed the reinforced enemy emplacements and sniper positions as well as two trucks used to reinforce and resupply the insurgent force," the statement said.

More than 100 suspected insurgents and an Afghan soldier were killed, coalition said. The casualty figures could not be independently verified due to remoteness of the area.

Clash also left three coalition and three Afghan soldiers wounded, the statement said. The nationality of the coalition soldier was not disclosed, but vast majority of them are American.

An Afghan army general told AFP that intercepted Taliban communications indicated that Mullah Brader was among several rebels killed in an early morning battle in volatile Helmand province.

'Virginia Tech could have saved lives'

AP, Richmond

Virginia Tech failed to properly care for a mentally troubled student gunman and waited too long to warn faculty and students after he killed his first two victims in a shooting spree that eventually claimed 31 more lives, including his own, a panel's report concluded.

Had university officials not waited more than two hours to tell the campus about the initial shootings, lives could have been saved when Seung-Hui Cho later began his massacre inside a classroom building, according to the report, released Wednesday night. "Warning the students, faculty and staff might have made a difference," the panel wrote. "So the earlier and clearer the warning, the more chance an individual had of surviving."

But the report concluded that while swifter warnings might have helped students and faculty, a lockdown of the 131 buildings on campus would not have been feasible.

Taliban release 12 Korean hostages

THE KOREA HERALD/ ANN, Seoul

A total of 12 South Korean hostages including two men were released in groups by the Taliban on Wednesday, a day after the insurgents agreed to release all 19 captives.

The remaining seven would be freed today, news reports said quoting Taliban members.

The Koreans were released on three different occasions, starting with three women identified as Ahn Hye-jin, 31, Lee Jeung-ran, 33, and Han Ji-young, 34, who were safely handed over to the South Korean authorities at 5:10pm (Korean time).

A couple of hours later, five more were freed. Soon after that, additional four hostages were released.

"All of them are believed to be in fair condition," Foreign Ministry spokesman Cho Hee-yong confirmed.

The nine are identified as: Ko Se-heon, 27; (female); Lee Sun-

young, 37; Lyu Jung-hwa, 39; Lee Ji-young, 36; Lim Hyun-joo, 33; Lyu Kyung-sik, 55, (male); Seo Myung-hwa, 29; Cha Hye-jin, 31; and Lee Ju-yeon, 27.

The releases follow the agreement reached with the Taliban on Tuesday that all 19 hostages—16 of them women—will be released on condition in return for Seoul's promise to withdraw its troops by the year's end and ban all Christian missionary activities.

The release of hostages began 41 days after the Taliban took control of a total of 23 Christian volunteer workers on a highway between Kabul and Kandahar on July 19. They had earlier killed two men—Bae Hyung-kyu and Shim Sung-min—and released two women—Kim Kyung-ja and Kim Gina—before this week's breakthrough deal.

"All of the released people are believed to be in good condition. We will make our utmost effort for the rest to be released safely and promptly," Cho Hee-yong said.

Gun-toting Sadr fighters disappear from slum

AFP, Sadr City

The black-clad, gun-toting fighters of Shia cleric Moqtada al-Sadr disappeared from the streets of Baghdad's Sadr City on Thursday, apparently obeying their leader's order to lie low.

An AFP photographer who walked the streets of the teeming neighbourhood said there was no sign of the Mahdi Army militiamen who usually dominate the Sadr City landscape.

Instead, residents grouped on street corners to discuss clashes that turned a Shia pilgrimage in the city of Karbala into a bloodbath and a subsequent freeze by Sadr on activities of his militia widely blamed for the fighting.

The firefights occurred Tuesday during one of Shia Islam's holiest

pilgrimages, the birth anniversary of Imam Mohammed al-Mahdi, an eighth century imam. The deadly clashes killed 52 people and left another 300 wounded.

While denying his Mahdi Army fighters were involved in the skirmishes, Sadr ordered a total freeze of all militia activities for six months.

The orders seem to have been quickly passed down the line and on Thursday Sadr City -- a bastion of Sadr followers -- was almost deserted as militiamen kept out of sight and most residents stayed indoors to mourn the killings in Karbala.

"The Mahdi Army is not on the streets of (Sadr) City today," said one fighter, who asked not to be named, from inside his small one-roomed home in one of the slum's myriad twisting bylanes.

Dragging train with teeth

AFP, Kuala Lumpur

A Malaysian man with a mouth of steel yesterday beat his own world record and dragged three train coaches 2.8 meters (nine feet) using only his teeth, his manager said.

Raja Gigi, who currently holds the Guinness World Record for pulling the heaviest weight, grappled with nearly 300 tonnes of metal (660 pounds) in an effort to beat his 2003 record and mark Malaysia's 50th year of nationhood.

"It went extremely well, he's broken the world record," said his manager Anna Chidamber, adding

that 41-year-old Raja was "very happy" with his feat.

She said the Malaysian records board would verify the attempt on Monday, and they would then submit an application to the Guinness World Record book.

About 200 Malaysians and a few curious tourists gathered at Kuala Lumpur's historic railway station to watch Raja, who made three attempts to pull the coaches along the track before settling on his 2.8-metre haul.

Raja, whose real name is Rathakrishnan Velu, currently holds the record for pulling a train weighing 260.8 tonnes a distance of 4.2 metres.



PHOTO: AFP

Rathakrishnan Velu (L), also known as "Raja Gigi" (King of Teeth), pulls a set of linked trains with his teeth in an attempt to break his Guinness Book of World Records for the heaviest weight pulled by teeth in downtown Kuala Lumpur yesterday. Rathakrishnan succeeded in breaking his previous record of pulling 260.8 tonnes made in 2003, setting a new record of 297.1 tonnes pulled over 2.8 meters.

Iran nuclear accord a 'significant step': IAEA

Tehran warns against fresh sanctions

AFP, AP, Vienna

Iran's agreement to answer key questions about its nuclear programme is "a significant step forward," but Tehran must do more to build confidence that it does not seek atomic weapons, the UN nuclear watchdog agency said yesterday.

"The work plan is a significant step forward," the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) said in a confidential report obtained by AFP.

But it said: "Once Iran's past nuclear programme has been clarified, Iran would need to continue to build confidence about the scope and nature of its present and future nuclear programme."

Iran has cleared up questions about its experiments with plutonium, a potential atom bomb material, said the IAEA report, which included a timetable Iran and the agency have agreed on to resolve outstanding issues.

The plutonium issue is one of several over which the UN Security Council has imposed sanctions to get Iran to cooperate with the IAEA, which is investigating US charges that Tehran is covertly developing nuclear weapons.

The IAEA's 35-nation board of governors will review the report at a meeting beginning September 10.

The United States has said that Iran is playing at cooperating with the IAEA in order to avoid further UN sanctions, and that it is still defying the UN demand to stop making enriched uranium.

Earlier a senior Iranian envoy warned the United States and its allies on Wednesday against pushing for new UN Security Council sanctions on his country, suggesting Tehran could retaliate by ending cooperation with UN experts probing its nuclear programme.

Sharif advised to stay in exile by Musharraf

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, Islamabad

Pakistan's President Pervez Musharraf has urged Nawaz Sharif not to return home and said that an "eminent personality" asked the former prime minister to honour his agreement with the government to complete 10 years in exile.

"I also urge him to abide by the agreement," the president on Wednesday told a gathering while inaugurating a bridge linking Pind Dadan Khan with Mandi Bhaudain in Punjab Province, the Dawn

newspaper reported on Thursday.

Sharif had reportedly entered into an agreement to go into exile for 10 years to avoid life imprisonment in a case of hijacking that emanated from his order to divert a plane carrying Musharraf home from a foreign tour just before the general toppled him in a bloodless coup in 1999.

The president said: "He had entered into a written agreement with a 'very eminent personality', a great friend and well-wisher of Pakistan, and the said person has given him a message not to violate

the agreement."

The government says the agreement struck in 2000, a year after Sharif's ouster, was brokered by Saudi Arabia and the Lebanese Hariri family.

Asking the former prime minister to "show character and not violate the agreement", the president told the gathering that Sharif himself had given his option to go abroad to avoid his life imprisonment. "He was sentenced for life and pleaded the 'eminent personality' to save him and had gone abroad to avoid the imprisonment."

Career Opportunities with UNDP



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For the list of posts and its details (including job description), please visit our website: <http://www.undp.org.bd/jobs>

Interested professionals and experts can submit their application by using 'Achievement Oriented Résumé' which is available at <http://www.undp.org.bd/jobs/cv.doc>. Applications can be submitted on-line or can be sent directly to the Country Director, UNDP-Dhaka, GPO Box : 224, Dhaka-1000, or deposited at the Deposit Box at the IDB Bhaban (Ground Floor), Begum Rokeya Sharani, Agargaon, Dhaka-1207 by 13 September 2007.

CHEVENING
British High Commission Dhaka

CHEVENING SCHOLARSHIP SCHEME 2008/09

The British High Commission in Dhaka invites applications for the Chevening Scholarship Scheme for the academic year beginning October 2008.

The Chevening Scholarship scheme is run by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in the United Kingdom and aims to give opportunities for study in the UK to the brightest young talent - potential leaders, decision makers and opinion formers of the future - in the fields of relevance to the UK's interests overseas.

We particularly encourage those actively working, as opposed to researching, in the following fields:

- Climate change
- Governance and reform
- Human Rights and the rule of law
- Security
- Tackling international crime (including drugs and people smuggling)

Candidates should be no older than 35 years old on 31 December 2007. Applications that do not meet these criteria will not be processed.

The scheme is open to first class and higher second class Masters degree holders with a minimum score of 7 in IELTS wishing to undertake one year's Masters study or equivalent level study in the United Kingdom.

One of the Scholarships will be co-funded by Unilever Bangladesh Limited. The fields of study corresponding to the Unilever Chevening Scholarship will include Health, Education and Women's Empowerment.

Candidates are chosen strictly on the basis of merit. Successful candidates will show genuine potential and ambition to play a significant role in Bangladesh in the future. They will also be expected to demonstrate that they have the motivation, personality and academic ability to benefit from their chosen course of study in the United Kingdom.

Application Forms should be obtained from the British Council at 5 Fuller Road, Dhaka 1000. Two sets of completed forms should be sent to Mrs Shamim Ahmed, British Council, Dhaka.

The closing date for receipt of applications is 27 September 2007.