

Iran replaces al-Qaeda as chief US concern in Iraq

AFP, Washington

Recent violence in Basra has convinced the administration of President George W Bush that Iran and not al-Qaeda is now the primary threat to US interests in Iraq, The Washington Post said yesterday.

Citing unnamed senior US officials, the newspaper said this view has sparked a broad reassessment of Washington's policy in the region and prompted Defence Secretary Robert Gates to speak about Tehran's "malign" influence there.

During their Washington visit, General David Petraeus, the top US military commander in Iraq, and Ambassador Ryan Crocker barely mentioned al-Qaeda in Iraq but spoke extensively of Iran, the paper said.

Leaders gather for summit as Mugabe meets Mbeki

US asks Mugabe to stop 'violence and intimidation'

AFP, Lusaka, Harare

The leaders of southern Africa gathered yesterday in Zambia for emergency talks to discuss the post-election crisis in neighbouring Zimbabwe, despite Robert Mugabe's decision to skip the summit.

South African President Thabo Mbeki, the regional heavyweight, was to hold talks with Mugabe in Harare on his way to the summit in Lusaka, a Zimbabwean government official told AFP.

In Lusaka, the head of Mugabe's delegation dismissed the meeting as unnecessary and angrily announced the invitation granted to Zimbabwe's opposition leader Morgan Tsvangirai.

"There is no need to regionalise the Zimbabwean crisis," Justice Minister Patrick Chinamasa told AFP as leaders of the 14-nation Southern African Development Community (SADC) made their way to the Zambian capital.

"Inviting an opposition leader

to a heads of state meeting is unheard of. We will not accept Tsvangirai to be part of this meeting," he said.

With still no result from a presidential election held two weeks ago, tensions are visibly mounting in Zimbabwe whose economic meltdown under Mugabe has scorched the whole region.

While Mugabe has chosen not to attend, his self-proclaimed successor Tsvangirai will have a golden opportunity to press his case it is time for 84-year-old

Mugabe to go.

Mugabe must stop using "violence and intimidation" in Zimbabwe and southern African leaders must take a "firm stand" for democracy there, a US official said Friday.

The US embassy in Harare found "credible reports of violence and intimidation used against individuals who may have voted in opposition to the government" in the March 29 election, State Department spokesman Sean McCormack said.



South Africa President Thabo Mbeki (L) and his Zimbabwean counterpart Robert Mugabe (R) speak to the press after their meeting in Harare yesterday. Mbeki, who held talks with Mugabe on his way to a summit of regional leaders to discuss Zimbabwe's post-election crisis, said there was no post-election crisis in Zimbabwe and urged people to wait for the presidential result to be announced.

Obama counting on Indiana

AP, Muncie

Barack Obama sees himself with a disadvantage in Pennsylvania and with an advantage in North Carolina. "So Indiana may end up being the tiebreaker," he said this week.

As he completes a four-day tour of the Hoosier state, that's the Illinois senator's assessment of the Democratic presidential contests in the coming three weeks.

For Obama, that's a tough call. Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton has single digit leads in the state, according to recent polls. She has the support of the state's popular Democratic senator, Evan Bayh. And the state has a sizable number of blue collar industrial workers, a demographic group that has leaned in her favor.

But Obama is from neighbouring Illinois, and is well-known in the Indiana counties around Lake Michigan that have access to Chicago's media market. He also has the support of two respected former members of Congress from Indiana Lee Hamilton and Tim Roemer.

Pennsylvania holds its primary April 22. Indiana and North Carolina hold theirs two weeks later. A two-out-of-three outcome in favor of the Illinois senator at the end of that stretch may not drive Clinton out of the race, but it will permit Obama to argue that after primary losses in Texas and Ohio, he can win an industrial state.

"If he wins Indiana, that's a pretty strong signal that he's probably going to secure the nomination in my view," said Rep. Baron Hill, an Indiana Democrat who has not endorsed either Clinton or Obama. Significantly, Hill is a superdelegate, one of nearly 800 party leaders and elected officials who could determine the nomination.



Leaders including (L-R) Sweden's Prime Minister Fredrik Reinfeldt, Chile's President Michelle Bachelet, Sri Lanka's President Mahinda Rajapaksa and Pakistan's President Pervez Musharraf pose for photos before attending the opening ceremony of the Boao Forum for Asia in Boao yesterday. Chinese President Hu Jintao met here with Taiwan's vice president-elect Vincent Siew, according to a pool report, in the highest-level contact ever between the two sides.

Keep off bomb-strewn streets of Sadr City, says Iraq

Fighting kills 13 people

AFP, Baghdad

Iraqi authorities ordered residents off the streets of Baghdad's Shia militia bastion Sadr City on Saturday, warning they are littered with bombs, after a night of fighting that killed 13 people.

The order came soon after the authorities partially lifted a vehicle ban that had imposed two weeks ago amid fierce clashes in Sadr City between the Mahdi Army militia of Shia cleric Moqtada al-Sadr and US and Iraqi forces.

"Groups of people have planted roadside bombs on the majority of the roads of Sadr City," Baghdad military command said in a statement.

"For the protection of our citizens and media personnel, we are warning people to stay off the streets until they have been cleared by the security forces," it said.

A US military statement listed the dead in the overnight battles as two snipers, two "criminals" firing

rocket-propelled grenades, six gunmen wielding machine guns and automatic weapons, and three men placing roadside bombs.

The US and Iraqi forces hit back with small-arms fire, a Hellfire missile fired from an unmanned aircraft and artillery shells blasted from a M1A2 Abrams tank, the statement said.

The fighting erupted at around 9:00 pm (1800 GMT) in Sadr City, a sprawling district of east Baghdad controlled by the Mahdi Army.

Residents showed an AFP photographer a house in the Jamila sector of Sadr City which had been hit during what they said was an airstrike.

Neighbours said that two small children and their parents were killed and another five family members wounded in the strike.

Hospital officials said women and children were among those killed and wounded but declined to give a breakdown.

Tibet is an internal matter, says Hu

AFP, Boao

Chinese President Hu Jintao took a hard line yesterday in his first remarks on the recent unrest in Tibet, saying the matter is an internal affair that impacts Chinese sovereignty.

Hu's comments to visiting Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd came a day after China intensified attacks on overseas critics, blasting a US House resolution on Tibet as "crude interference" and labelling a leading Tibetan exile group a terrorist organisation.

His remarks follow massive

demonstrations by pro-Tibet activists and other groups targeting the torch relay for the 2008 Beijing Summer Olympic Games. The protests have stirred anger from the government in Beijing and among Chinese citizens.

Hu spoke to Rudd at a meeting on the sidelines of a regional economic forum in the southern province of Hainan. He addressed the issues of exiled spiritual leader the Dalai Lama whom Beijing blames for fomenting the unrest, and the anti-government protests that broke out in the Tibetan capital of Lhasa last month.

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Iraqi boys set fire to an Iraqi Army armoured personnel carrier destroyed days earlier in clashes with Shia fighters in Baghdad's Sadr City neighbourhood yesterday.

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NOTICE OF ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Notice is hereby given that the **Forty Seventh Annual General Meeting** of Reckitt Benckiser (Bangladesh) Limited will be held at Trust Milonayatan, Shaheed Jahangir Gate, 545 Old Airport Road, Dhaka Cantonment, Dhaka-1206 on Thursday, the 26th June 2008 at 10:30 a.m. to transact the following business:

AGENDA

- To confirm the Minutes of the Forty Sixth Annual General Meeting held on 4th April 2007.
- To receive and adopt the Financial Statements for the year ended 31st December 2007 together with the Auditors' and Directors' Report thereon.
- To approve Dividend as recommended by the Board.
- To elect Directors.
- To confirm the appointment of new Managing Director.
- To appoint Auditors for the year 2008 and to fix their remuneration.

By order of the Board
sd/-
Wahed Aziz-Ur Rahman
Company Secretary

Dhaka, 13th April 2008

Notes:

- 15th April 2008 is the RECORD DATE. Shareholders whose name will appear in the Shares Register of the Company or in the Depository Register on that date will be eligible to attend the AGM and receive dividend approved.
- A Member entitled to attend and vote at the Annual General Meeting may appoint another Member of the company as Proxy to attend and vote instead of him/her. A Form of Proxy must be stamped and deposited at the Company's Registered Office or Corporate Office not less than 72 hours before the time fixed for the Meeting.

VEET, Dettol, Mortein, Tix, MR BRASSO, HARPIC

Lanka man freed after languishing in jail for 55 years without charge

AFP, Colombo

A Sri Lankan court has released a man who was held in custody for 55 years without charge, a report said on Saturday.

Thantriye Emis Singho, 83, was arrested by police in 1953 for carrying a sword in a Colombo suburb.

A court sent him to a state-run mental hospital for treatment, the Daily Mirror newspaper said.

"Although he had been transferred to the cured persons' unit at the hospital, no authority had inquired after him or produced him in court," the newspaper said.

Singho's plight was discovered by a human rights lawyer and a social worker who were doing a study on mental patients. They traced the man's relatives and won a court order to secure his release last Thursday.

Earlier this year, another 80-year-old man who spent 50 years in custody at the same state-run mental hospital without facing charges was freed.

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