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NEW AGE

International

US policy in Iraq encourages terrorism: Assad

REUTERS, MADRID, May 12

Syrian President Bashar al-Assad said US policy was encouraging terrorism in Iraq and instability in the region.

He also said in an interview published on Wednesday that some in Washington might want war with Syria.

The comments to Spanish newspaper El Pais and Italy's La Repubblica were published a day after President Bush imposed economic sanctions on Syria and accused Damascus of supporting terrorism.

"For the first time the United States has turned into a source of instability instead of stability... The war in Iraq has unleashed a hatred that is finding an echo in terrorism," Assad said.

Assad said the United States should instead help combat terrorism in its neighbour Iraq and in the Palestinian territories by adopting a "fair" political position, fostering economic development and cultural understanding.

Assad said in the interview, conducted before Bush imposed the sanctions, that Syrian-US relations were complicated by conflicting messages from Washington.

"There is one current that wants to cooperate with Syria through dialogue and reciprocity, and another that does not want this contact and is looking for pressure and perhaps war," Assad said.

"On the other hand, there is dialogue between Syrian and US institutions, above all in the question of the fight against terrorism."

Syria has suffered from the US occupation of Iraq, Assad said, citing a fall in foreign investment in the region and heightened tensions between Syria's own tribes and families.

"Now we are going to see the effects on security. Iraq is chaotic and uncontrolled, there are arms being smuggled out toward Syria, also a rise in extremism and a feeling of hatred toward the United States which did not exist before."

In ordering sanctions on Tuesday, Bush accused Damascus of supporting terrorism, pursuing weapons of mass destruction and failing to prevent anti-US guerrillas entering Iraq.

The sanctions ban US exports to Syria except for food and medicine, freeze assets of Syrians the United States suspects of terrorism and prohibit Syrian flights to and from the United States, among other measures.

Assad said Syria supported dismantling all weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East region—including Israeli nuclear warheads—a plan it presented to the UN Security Council.

WORLDLINE

Israeli strike kills 3 Palestinians in Gaza

An Israeli helicopter gunship fired a missile near a mosque in Gaza City on Wednesday, killing three Palestinians and wounding at least eight, most of them women and children, witnesses and medics said. The Israeli army said it fired at a group laying explosives against Israeli forces in the Zeitoun neighbourhood, where Palestinian militants blew up six Israeli soldiers in a troop carrier during a raid on Tuesday. "We understand it hit civilians, but they (the militants) are carrying explosives in civilian areas and if we hadn't hit them we would have seen another event like the one yesterday," an army spokeswoman said.

— Reuters

Suu Kyi release in doubt

Only days before Myanmar's landmark constitutional convention begins, the pro-democracy opposition has still not decided whether to attend and hopes for the release of Aung San Suu Kyi are fading. The National League for Democracy (NLD) said late last

"The conclusion we draw is that the US is not sincere. Otherwise it would have backed our proposal," he said.

Assad said democratic and economic changes within Syria were moving slowly because security had taken priority.

"The economic situation is going backwards," he said, but added that Syria had made progress in starting private banks, universities and newspapers. Private broadcasters were next, he said.

But Syria lacked experience in marketing and planning and was unable to set up an Internet programme because it was banned internationally from buying the technology it needed, Assad said.

Saddam unlikely to be handed to Iraqis by June 30

REUTERS, BAGHDAD, May 12

Saddam Hussein is unlikely to be handed over to Iraqi authorities ahead of the June 30 transfer of sovereignty, and will probably stand trial in 2005, the director of the court that will try him said on Wednesday.

In a statement, Salem Chalabi, director of the Iraqi Special Tribunal, modified comments he made in Kuwait on Tuesday, when he said the former president could be handed to Iraqis along with other top detainees before the US-led occupying coalition hands over sovereignty.

"Mr Chalabi stated that the US has indicated that it is willing to hand over individuals in custody – when indicted – to the Iraqi Special Tribunal, if the Iraqi Special Tribunal is ready to take custody of them," the statement said.

"When asked if that would be before June 30, Mr Chalabi stated that it is unlikely the tribunal would be ready to take custody of the defendants before June 30."

The statement said it was premature to discuss timetables but that "some individuals may be indicted within the next few months and...should trials with respect to these individuals commence, it would likely be in 2005."

State Department spokesman Richard Boucher, in remarks posted on its Web site, said in response to Chalabi's earlier remarks: "When it will be appropriate to hand him...over to Iraqi authorities has not been decided at this point.

"Our position remains as it has been, that we would turn him over at the appropriate time in the appropriate manner."

US planning war: DPRK

AFP, BEIJING, May 12

North Korea accused the United States of planning war as envoys from six countries opened delicate working-level talks in Beijing aimed at

defusing a standoff over the Stalinist regime's nuclear programme.

Rodong Sinmun, mouthpiece of North Korea's ruling Workers' Party, urged South Korea to join with the North in opposing what it said was a US scheme to unleash military conflict on the peninsula.

"A touch-and-go tension in the true sense of the word is persisting in Korea due to the US imperialists' reckless

month it was almost certain to attend the convention as it expected the ruling junta to accept its proposed changes to procedures under which the forum will be run. The convention, aimed at drafting a new constitution, is the first step in the regime's "roadmap to democracy" which it bills as culminating in free and fair elections to end four decades of military rule.
— AFP

Megawati seeks new Indonesia term

Indonesia's President Megawati Sukarnoputri registered on Wednesday to run for a new term in the July 5 election, saying that she has painstakingly fixed a broken country and put it on the right track. She joined a crowded field of candidates vying to lead the world's fourth most populous country. Later on Wednesday, her vice president, Hamzah Haz, signed up to seek the top job himself, completing the six-contender line-up. Since she took over in 2001 Megawati has introduced unpopular cuts in subsidies, triggering higher prices for some essentials, and is seen as lagging in popularity behind the favourite, her former security minister Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono.
— Reuters

3 Pakistanis killed on Kashmir border

The Indian army killed three Pakistani rebels who tried to cross the de facto border in Kashmir despite a truce on the

moves to start a war against (North Korea) under the pretext of the nuclear issue," it said.

"Unavoidable is the confrontation between the Koreans in the north and the south, who are advancing along the road of peace and peaceful reunification, and the US, which is working to block it."

US faces prisoner abuse complaint in Afghanistan

REUTERS, KABUL, May 12

The US military, struggling to contain a crisis over its treatment of Iraqi prisoners, announced on Wednesday it had launched an investigation into a complaint of detainee abuse in Afghanistan.

The US embassy in Kabul said an Afghan police officer, reportedly held by US-led forces in the city of Gardez and the US base at Bagram in 2003, said he had been stripped naked, photographed, kicked and subjected to "sexual taunting."

The allegation will be of major concern to the 20,000-strong US-led force in Afghanistan, which until now has not faced the same level of resistance its troops have in Iraq since it helped topple the Taliban regime late in 2001.

"Yesterday afternoon, coalition leaders were notified of an allegation of detainee abuse," US military spokesman Lieutenant-Colonel Tucker Mansager told a news briefing, apparently referring to the police officer's complaint.

"Upon notification, coalition forces immediately launched an investigation into this matter. The investigation continues."

Graphic photographs of US soldiers abusing naked Iraqi prisoners have been shown across the globe, incensing the Arab world and damaging US credibility.

The US military is under pressure to allow the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission access to suspected Islamic militants from al-Qaeda and the Taliban held at centres including at its main Afghan base at Bagram, just north of Kabul.

Mansager said the issue of wider access was being considered, but added: "The coalition believes that the International Committee of the Red Cross rightfully and properly represents

the interests of persons placed under control in a proper manner.

"As they have in the past, they will continue to have access to our Bagram facility that they visit on a regular basis."

It is not known how many prisoners are being held at Bagram or who they are. An investigation into the deaths of two prisoners while in US detention in December, 2002, has yet to be completed.

The Afghan rights body says it has received complaints from more than two dozen detainees released from US custody about their treatment.

"To the best of our knowledge this is the first time anyone in the military chain of command or the United States Embassy has heard of this alleged mistreatment," US ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad said of the police officer's

frontier of the divided Himalayan territory, an army spokesman has said. He said on Wednesday troops found weapons on the bodies of the three Pakistani nationals, who were killed in a half-hour battle Tuesday in the southern Rajouri district. The spokesman said the infiltration bid was the seventh this year. India accuses Pakistan of arming and funding rebels and helping them sneak across the disputed border to take part in an Islamic insurgency against Indian rule in Kashmir that has claimed tens of thousands of lives since 1989.

— AFP

Australian child sex abuser commits suicide

A former Australian diplomat jailed for 13 years on the holiday island of Bali for lewd conduct with minors has killed himself less than a day after sentencing, a witness who saw the body said on Wednesday. William Brown had been found guilty of sexually abusing two teenage boys on the Indonesian resort isle. When the Karangasem district court handed down the sentence on Tuesday, Brown had reacted with rage, shouting expletives and shaking his fist at the judge, while spectators clapped and cheered the verdict. "Another convict found Brown's body early in the morning around 6:30am.

— Reuters

accusations.

"We are not aware of the existence of any photos of the alleged incident," he added in an embassy statement.

Suicide bombers usually neither mad, fanatical nor poor: Experts

AFP, LONDON, May 12

Suicide bombers who have sown mayhem from Israel to Iraq and from Chechnya to Sri Lanka are usually far from being the madmen, religious fanatics or impoverished misfits they are often portrayed as, *New Scientist* says.

The British science weekly says that experts who have studied the psychological profiles and backgrounds of suicide bombers find these assailants are often secular, well-educated individuals.

Many of them are born to prosperous families and take a rational decision about the path they chose, says a report in this Saturday's issue.

"What this amounts to is in many ways more alarming than the ubiquitous misperception of the suicide bomber as fanatical," *New Scientist* says. "It means that in the right circumstances, anyone could be one."

A study of Hamas and Palestinian suicide attackers from the 1980s to 2003 by Claude Berrebi, an economist at Princeton University, found that only 13 percent of them came from a poor background, compared with 32 percent of the Palestinian population in general.

In addition, more than half the suicide bombers had entered further education, compared with just 15 percent of the general population.

Similarly, a study into Hezbollah militants who died in action in Lebanon in the 1980s and 1990s were less like to have come from poor families and likelier to have attended secondary school than others of their age.

As for the idea that suicide bombers are simply suicidal, that is discounted by Israeli psychologist Ariel Merari of Tel Aviv University.

He studied the backgrounds of every suicide bomber in the Middle East since 1983, when the modern era of suicide attacks began with the truck bomb assault US embassy in Beirut, killing 63 people.

"In the majority, you find none of the risk factors normally associated with suicide, such as mood disorders or schizophrenia, substance abuse or history of attempted suicide," Merari told *New Scientist*.

Eyad El Sarraj, chairman of the Gaza Community Mental Health Programme, said his own studies of Palestinian "martyrs" found a common source in a traumatic childhood experience.

All had experienced helplessness as a child, particularly the humiliation of their father by Israeli soldiers.

Whatever the individual trigger, suicide bombers are invariably channelled by a disciplined, well-organised group into taking the path of self destruction in the fight against the enemy, the report says.

Kerry blasts Bush over healthcare costs

Democratic presidential candidate John Kerry warned on Tuesday that healthcare costs were crippling small businesses and criticised President Bush for taking campaign money from companies picked to administer new prescription drug cards for seniors. Kerry stayed focused on delivering his week-long message: that the nation's health system is "badly broken" and that Bush stood by as the cost of care and drugs soared. Kerry said health insurance premiums for small businesses had risen 47 per cent in just three years, putting jobs at risk in what he called "the most inefficient, ineffective delivery of service you can possibly have."

— AFP

Financial Times for Rumsfeld resignation

Britain's influential *Financial Times* newspaper demanded the resignation of US Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld over the abuse and torture of Iraqi prisoners and issued a stinging criticism of his boss, George W Bush. "Donald Rumsfeld professes to take responsibility for the outrages at Abu Ghraib prison (near Baghdad). But nobody will believe it until he and others at the top of the command chain are fired," the FT said in an editorial. The paper gave a damning assessment of the US-led occupation of Iraq, which it called "a seamless catalogue of