

Election ban on former Baathists lifted in Iraq

By **STEPHEN JONES**
Epoch Times Staff

Iraq has lifted a ban on almost 500 election candidates with alleged affiliation with the political party of former dictator Saddam Hussein.

The ban on the candidates, imposed last month, was lifted by an appeals panel on Wednesday, allowing the candidates to take part in the country's March election.

The list contained several high-profile Sunni politicians and had prompted accusations of anti-Sunni bias from the once-dominant religious community.

"The appeals panel decided to allow the banned candidates to participate in the next election and decided to postpone looking into the case until after the election," said Hamdiya al-Husseini, a member of the Independent High Electoral Commission, in a statement.

However, al-Husseini said that any of those on the list who win the vote in March would first have to be fully investigated before they would be allowed to take office.

Iraq's Kurdish President Jalal Talabani had previously asked for the ban to be lifted, claiming that it could be illegal as it was not approved by parliament.

The decision to overturn the ban will also come as a relief to U.S. officials engaged in drawing up a strategic withdrawal from Iraq.

Iraq's long-term relationship with the west hinges on the results of the March 7 election, and there are fears that a heavily-weighted Shia government would lean too closely toward Iran.

The decision to disallow the list of candidates in the first place came from the Iraqi government Accountability and Justice Commission.

Among the members of the commission is Ahmed Chalabi, a Shia Muslim who helped instigate the war with the American leadership, and in 2005 met personally with Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

The policies of the commission against former Baathists have been likened to a witch hunt, which has in turn fueled sectarian tension between the majority Shias and former dominant Sunnis.

On Wednesday, a suicide bomber killed 20 Shia pilgrims in the Iraqi city of Karbala, as the community gathered to mark Arbaeen, the end of 40 days of mourning for the death of the Prophet Muhammad's grandson.

Forty others were killed on Monday, when a female suicide bomber detonated an explosives vest amid a crowd of Shia pilgrims making their way to Karbala.

No group has claimed responsibility for the attacks but they are believed to have stemmed from Sunni insurgents.

NASA moving toward broader horizons

By **JOSHUA PHILIPP**
Epoch Times Staff

With an additional \$6 billion in its budget over the next five years, NASA has several projects in the works that aim to boldly go where no man, or probe, has gone before.

Of the new funds, \$2 billion is going to NASA's Science Missions, with a new focus on climate change and earth science. A mission to send a probe into the sun's atmosphere in 2018 is also included, along with numerous other probe missions.

"This new money can really accelerate the new missions," said associate administrator of the NASA Science Missions Directorate Dr. Edward Weler during a Feb. 2 teleconference, adding that the money will be used on a group of missions that "make sense."

"You want to be sure you got it right," Mr. Weler said. "The worst thing we could do is base things on hope rather than reality."

There are some cuts, however, including the Constellation program to return humans to the moon by 2020. The program was "over budget and behind schedule" and "was intended to do what we've already done," said Peter Orszag, director of the Office of Management and Budget, during a Feb. 1 White House press conference.

Emphasis will instead be placed on developing new technologies and advance current capabilities.

It was also announced that NASA will begin relying on commercial space flight industries to shuttle astronauts to the international space station—a decision NASA is still discussing how to properly implement but one that could open new doors in commercial space ventures.

"We're looking at this as an open area, a new area," said Bill Gerstenmaier, NASA associate administrator for space operations, during a Feb. 2 teleconference.

He added that astronauts will still be sent to the international space station in an upcoming mission, as previously scheduled, and will conduct various kinds of research. Gerstenmaier said the research on the "unique property of space" makes way for technologies such as commercial space stations and space hotels.

NASA is providing \$50 million to help along the commercial space industry in developing technology to transport astronauts to and from low Earth orbit. Sierra Nevada Corporation will receive the most, at \$20 million; Boeing Company will receive \$18 million; and other industries will receive between \$1.4 and



LAUNCH ROOM: NASA mission managers monitor NASA Space Shuttle Atlantis STS-129 from firing room four as it lifts off from launch pad 39A at the Kennedy Space Center November 16, 2009 in Cape Canaveral, Florida. BILL INGALLS/NASA VIA GETTY IMAGES

\$6.7 million.

"These selections represent a critical step to enable future commercial human spaceflight," said Doug Cooke, associate administrator for Exploration Systems in a NASA press release.

Things are not all cheery at NASA, however. During a Tuesday teleconference, Cooke said that cutting the Constellation mission to the moon "will bring uncertainty in to workforce."

Cuts to Constellation also included the cancellation of the Ares 1, Ares 5, and Orion spacecrafts

and carrier.

"It is difficult for those of us who worked on those for a number of years," said Cooke. "Its end will create an angst on workers who were working on it."

Cooke added that the cuts will also be "mitigated by new opportunities," including new initiatives and an increased budget for exploration to work with.

"The commercial crew investment will move NASA more toward work in exploration and out of the business of operations to low Earth orbit," said Cooke. "So that

is an important part of our new work here."

There is a shift in the exploration approach that will end old technologies and enable new technologies to be developed. Cooke added that in addition to new ventures, NASA will also have technology they have worked on before as a foundation.

"This is an opportunity to develop these capabilities that really help us go beyond places we've been in exploration," Cooke said. "The funding for many of these areas has always been limited."

Iran sends mixed messages as tension mounts

IRAN CONTINUED FROM P1

"If we allow them to take it, there is no problem. We sign a contract to give 3.5 per cent enriched uranium and receive 20 per cent enriched after four or five months," he said.

However, at a press conference on Wednesday, the French foreign minister, Bernard Kouchner, said that Tehran was "trying to buy time."

He told reporters in Paris that he was "perplexed and even a bit pessimistic."

In a bid to break the international deadlock over Iran's nuclear program, the U.N. suggested that Tehran export low-enriched uranium to Russia or France for further enrichment. The uranium could then be used as part of a civilian nuclear program.

Iran has so far refused to accept the deal.

U.S. State Department spokesman, PJ Crowley, said that any deal should be agreed through the International Atomic Energy Agency.

"If Iran is serious, they can inform the IAEA that they are ready to accept the deal that's on the table," he said.

On Tuesday, just hours after Ahmadinejad's TV announcement, Iran said that it had launched a 10-foot research rocket into space.

The launch of the rocket—part of Iran's space program—has worried analysts, who believe the same technology could also be used to launch

a nuclear warhead.

Currently Iran has missiles with a range of 1,250 miles, which could hit Israel or U.S. bases within the Persian Gulf region.

The U.S. has sent ships and missiles to the region in a bid to deter any Iranian attack. On Tuesday, the Pentagon released a ballistic missile review, which described Iran's missile capacity as a threat to U.S. forces and allies.

In mid-January, Iranian defense minister, Ahmad Vahidi had warned that the 90 Western warships stationed in the Persian Gulf—a waterway crucial for world oil supplies—would become targets if Iran was attacked over its nuclear program.

On Wednesday, the U.S. announced the failure of its first missile test aimed at shooting down a long-range missile.

The test, which cost \$150 million, was designed to mimic an attack from Iran.

Ali Larijani, speaker of the Iranian parliament, said on Wednesday that the test was unnecessary.

"Regional countries should know that this puppet show by the U.S. while claiming to create security in the region is nothing except a new political ploy to increase the [American] military presence at the expense of others," he said.

Top climate adviser calls for more openness in global warming debate

By **JOAN DELANEY**
Epoch Times Staff

In the wake of a string of embarrassing blunders by global warming researchers, the chief scientific adviser to the British government has said scientists must be more "honest and open" about the uncertainties surrounding climate change.

Professor John Beddington said that although it is "unchallengeable" that carbon dioxide is warming the planet, climate researchers should be less hostile to those who seek to question their findings.

"I don't think it's healthy to dismiss proper skepticism," he told the Daily Mail reporter. "Science grows and improves in the light of criticism. There is a fundamental uncertainty about climate change prediction that can't be changed."

Beddington also said that computer climate modelling is susceptible to "quite substantial uncertainties" that should be made clear.

The professor's comments follow the "Glaciergate" revelations two weeks ago in which Rajendra Pachauri, head of the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), was forced to apologize for the erroneous claim that most of the Himalayan glaciers would melt by 2035.

It turned out that the warning, which appeared in the IPCC's Nobel prize-winning 2007 report, was taken from a 1999 article in the New Scientist magazine and based on a casual remark by an Indian scientist who later said his comment was speculation.

It has since emerged that the 2007 report also exaggerated claims that global warming will increase the number and severity of tropical storms and hurricanes.

In November, climate researchers



Britain's chief scientific adviser Professor John Beddington (centre) says climate researchers must be more "honest and open" about the uncertainties surrounding climate change. MATT CARDY/GETTY IMAGES

again had red faces after leaked emails and documents appeared to show that critical temperature data from the University of East Anglia's Climatic Research Unit—data used by the IPCC—were intentionally manipulated to show increased warming trends.

The emails also appeared to show the CRU researchers urging each other to delete emails, conniving to prevent other scientists from publishing of dissenting views, and debating how to avoid complying with Freedom of Information requests.

On Jan. 28, the U.K.'s Information Commissioner's office ruled that the scientists involved in the "Climategate" email scandal breached the Freedom of Information Act by refusing to release data requested by climate change skeptics.

However, the scientists will not be prosecuted because the offences occurred more than six months ago.

The ruling is the result of a complaint filed by retired engineer David Holland, whose Freedom of Information requests were ignored.

"All we are trying to do is make the

scientists follow their own professional rules by being open, transparent, and honest," Holland told the Mail. "We are not trying to show that human beings don't affect the climate, but to show that the science is not settled."

Professor Beddington said gaffes such as the false claim regarding the Himalayan glaciers fuels skepticism. "We have a problem in communicating uncertainty. There's definitely an issue there. If there wasn't, there wouldn't be the level of scepticism... On the rate of change and the local effects, there are uncertainties both in terms of empirical evidence and the climate models themselves."

Dr. Benny Peiser of the U.K.'s Global Warming Policy Foundation thinktank told the Mail that she welcomed Beddington's remarks.

"His public rebuke is a highly significant development which we hope will help to restore some much needed balance and realism to the climate debate."

There have been mounting calls for the U.N. to reform the IPCC and for the panel to include research from skeptical scientists in its reports.

Fiji's military ruler tests the boundaries

Fiji CONTINUED FROM P1

Amnesty International has raised concerns about the status of human rights in Fiji, asserting that without a constitution, Fijians are vulnerable to the unchecked authority of their leaders' decisions.

"With Fiji cracking down even harder on its own people, this is not the time for New Zealand and other countries in the region to back down from their strong stance. They must intensify their calls for Fiji to immediately halt arbitrary arrests, intimidation, threats, assaults and detention of critics of the regime," said Apolosi Bose, Amnesty International's Pacific researcher.

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade in Canberra, Australia, said it will continue its sanctions, including travel bans on Fijian officials and their families, until the Fijian government returns to democracy and the rule of law.

The Australian Strategic Policy Institute, however, has criticized this approach.

"[Bainimarama] believes that the process will now take until 2014 to do, that he has actually met the requirements of both the forum and the Commonwealth Secretariat in laying down a roadmap to full return to democracy," said professor Richard Herr of the University of Tasmania to ABC Radio. "[Bainimarama] seems to find it strange there are those that won't accept that he's now met that condition and help him get on with it."

The Commonwealth Secretariat is a voluntary association of nations that promotes democracy and economic development.

Eni Faleomavaega agrees, saying sanctions have not been helpful.

"On Fiji, Canberra and Washington have employed heavy-handed tactics and misguided sanctions that have hurt average Fijians far more than the interim government at which they were targeted," he wrote in an opinion piece for Fairfax News.

"Foreign policy elites in Australia and New Zealand erroneously view the region with a Eurocentric mentality without having a better sense of appreciation of Fiji's colonial history."

The Australian government expressed its support for New Zealand in re-establishing diplomatic ties with Fiji after both countries expelled each other's representatives last year. However, controversy has since arisen over Fiji's nomination of military spokesperson Lt. Col. Neumi Lewemi as its ambassador to New Zealand.

Apart from the fact that New Zealand still has a travel ban on military officials involved in the 2006 coup, Lewemi, in his role as permanent secretary for Information, was also responsible for the censorship of Fijian media.

Fiji's Land Force Cmdr. Brig. Pita Driti told Auckland's Radio Tarana that the appointment was "a test" to see how far the New Zealand government is willing to accommodate for diplomacy.

Professor of history at Auckland University Steve Hoadley says Bainimarama's choice of appointment was just another act of defiance.

"So in a sense, the commodore is trying to provoke a fight. He may in the eyes of those who support his regime appear to be resolute, strong and defiant in Fiji's interests, but I think objective observers will see him as being in fact...somewhat unwilling to take advantage of this opportunity in Fiji's wider interests," he told ABC Radio.

Concerns are also mounting about China's influence on the tiny island nation. While Australia and New Zealand have disengaged from Fiji in an endeavour to force the re-establishment of democracy, China has been quick to fill the gap.

Fiji is poised to receive \$70 million in aid from China for more infrastructure projects, such as the China-built and funded Navuso Bridge that opened in May 2009.

"Fiji regards the relationship with Beijing and the people of the China as one of its most important," Fiji's Vice President Ratu Epeli Nailatikau said last year according to media reports.

While Australia, New Zealand, and other nations banned Fijian officials and their families from traveling through their countries, Bainimarama has continued to travel freely to China.