

y in '12-18 months'

velop a timeline for progress. At the same time, he declared, the US needed to redouble its efforts to succeed in Iraq.

Iraq leaders have agreed to a timeline for making the hard decisions needed to resolve these issues," the ambassador said, adding, "We are helping Iraqi leaders complete a national compact."

Political forces must make difficult decisions in the coming weeks. Each agreement on outstanding issues on which Iraqis differ, Chalilzad said.

He outlined a number of measures against which Iraqi progress

would be measured, including devising a way to share the country's oil wealth among all religious and ethnic groups.

In recent weeks, a number of Republican lawmakers and party elders have expressed doubts about whether the administration's approach to stabilising Iraq was succeeding and have been calling for a change in strategy.

Mr Bush, in a CNBC television interview, said: "Well, I've been talking about a change in tactics ever since I - ever since we went in, because the role of the commander-in-chief is to say to our

generals, 'You adjust to the enemy on the battlefield.'"

White House press secretary Tony Snow said on Monday that the US would adjust its Iraq strategy but would not issue any ultimatums to the Iraqis.

"Are there dramatic shifts in policy? The answer is no," Mr Snow said.

He acknowledged, however, that Mr Bush no longer is saying that the US will "stay the course" in Iraq.

"He stopped using it," Mr Snow said of that phrase.

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WORLD QUICKLY

CELLPHONES CUT SPERM COUNT

NEW ORLEANS: Men who talk on their cellphones for more than four hours a day have significantly lower sperm count than usual, a new study found.

The research, which involved 361 fertility patients, found that these men produce about 40 per cent less sperm than those who do not use cellphones at all, British newspaper The Times reported.

The study, led by Dr Ashok Agarwal of the Cleveland Clinic in Ohio, suggests that the electromagnetic fields generated by cellphones could interfere with sperm production.

'AUSTRALIA A REGIONAL BULLY'

NADI (Fiji): Australia rejected accusations that it was a regional bully as it began a potentially fiery meeting with some of its South Pacific neighbours yesterday.

Papua New Guinea Prime Minister Michael Somare used the formal opening of the Pacific Islands Forum to accuse Australia of being insensitive after a raid on the office of Solomon Islands leader Manasseh Sogavare last week.

Solomons' police, with Australian officers present, raided Mr Sogavare's office amid a diplomatic row over Mr Sogavare's appointment of Australian citizen Julian Moti, wanted in Australia on child sex charges, as his chief legal officer.

REUTERS

1 MILLION QUESTIONS FOR PUTIN

MOSCOW: Russians have submitted more than a million questions for President Vladimir Putin's annual televised question-and-answer session.

Mr Putin will take part today in the live phone-in, in which people from around the country ask him selected questions.

The event is the Russian President's fifth since he came to office in 2000.

The most popular questions concerned housing, student stipends, the minimum wage, inflation and benefits for large families.

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AP PHOTOGRAPHER KIDNAPPED

JERUSALEM: Four Palestinian gunmen kidnapped an Associated Press photographer in the Gaza Strip yesterday, grabbing him as he walked out of his apartment and whisking him away in their vehicle.

Mr Ghazi Hamad, spokesman for the Hamas-led Palestinian government, condemned the kidnapping of Mr Emilio Morenatti, 37, saying it "damages the reputation of the Palestinian people". "The government will take all steps to ensure his release," he added.

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FRANCE SETS POLL DATES

PARIS: The French government yesterday fixed April 22, 2007, as the date for the first round of the presidential election, with the second round two weeks later on May 6.

Elections for a new National Assembly will follow on June 10 and 17, government spokesman Jean-Francois Cope announced.

Under the 2000 constitutional reform that reduced the president's mandate from seven to five years, presidential and parliamentary terms are intended to run more or less concurrently to avoid the risk of so-called "cohabitation" between opposing parties.

The frontrunners in the race are Interior Minister Nicolas Sarkozy of the ruling Union for a Popular Movement and the Socialist Party's Segolene Royal, though neither has yet been formally designated a candidate.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

PHOTO: AFP

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