

this is a tough task, but they can't run us out of the Middle East, that they can't intimidate America."

Having recently described the violence in Iraq as merely "unsettling", Bush had re-characterised it as "hor-

still unspokeable sectarian violence in Iraq. I know that's troubling to the American people."

Colin Powell, former US Secretary of State, said at the weekend that the "active Army is about broken".

180,000 in the Marine Corps.

But Bush said that new Defence Secretary Robert Gates, who was sworn in this week and arrived in Baghdad yesterday for several days, would provide a "new perspective".

John Abizaid, meanwhile is to retire early next year.

— TELEGRAPH GROUP LTD, INDEPENDENT

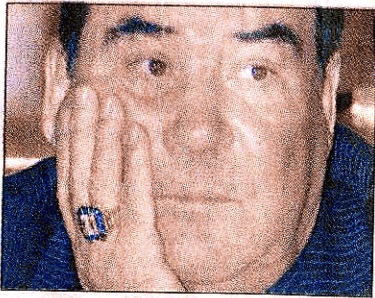
# 'Father of All Turkmen' dies at age 66

**ASHGABAT** — President Saparmurat Niyazov — who created a vast cult of personality during two decades of iron-fisted rule over arid, energy-rich Turkmenistan — has died, officials said yesterday. He was 66.

A terse report from state television said Niyazov died yesterday of heart failure and showed a black-framed portrait of the man who had ordered citizens to refer to him as "Turkmenbashi" — the Father of All Turkmen.

Niyazov underwent major heart surgery in Germany in 1997 and last month publicly acknowledged for the first time that he had heart disease. But he did not seem seriously ill. Two weeks ago he appeared in public to formally open an amusement park named after him outside the capital.

Niyazov had led Turkmenistan since 1985, when it was still a Soviet



**CULT FIGURE: Saparmurat Niyazov ruled from 1985.** PICTURE / REUTERS

republic. After the 1991 Soviet collapse, he retained control and began creating an elaborate personality cult, turning Turkmenistan into one of the most oppressive of the ex-Soviet states.

He ordered the months and days of the week named after himself and his

family, and statues of him were erected throughout the nation.

He is listed as author of the *Rukhnama (Book of the Soul)* that was required reading in schools.

Children pledged allegiance to him every morning.

He crushed all opposition and drew condemnation from human rights groups and Western governments.

A 2002 alleged assassination attempt against Niyazov sparked a severe crackdown, leading to dozens of arrests that were criticised by international human rights groups and the United States Government.

Former Foreign Minister Boris Shikhmuradov was named as the mastermind of the plot and sentenced to life in prison after a Stalinist-style show trial broadcast on television that included a taped confession in which he said he was a drug addict and hired

mercenaries for the attack.

It was unclear who may be in line to replace Niyazov or how the succession process would be conducted.

The funeral is to be held on Sunday. Turkmenistan — a majority Muslim country dominated by the vast Kara Kum desert — has the world's fifth-largest natural gas reserves, but Niyazov failed to convert that wealth into prosperity for his country's five million people.

This year, the eccentric leader announced he would provide citizens with natural gas and power free of charge through to 2030. But he has also tapped the country's vast energy wealth for outlandish projects, including a huge man-made lake in the Kara Kum desert, a vast cypress forest to change the desert climate, an ice palace outside the capital, a ski resort and a 40m pyramid.

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