



PHOTO: AFP
Naomi Zuckerman (R), 13, and Liz Vanderpool, 13, sing a protest song along with other anti-war demonstrators outside the FBI building in Washington, DC, on Sunday. Protesters gathered for a second day of demonstrations against a war with Iraq.

Iraq, UN ink 10-point accord

Chief inspectors push to avert war amid progress in talks

AFP, Baghdad

Iraq and the United Nations signed Monday a 10-point agreement to facilitate the work of disarmament monitors, chief UN weapons inspector Hans Blix announced.

The accord covers access to all sites, including private homes, encourages Iraqi scientists to accept private interviews and appoints a team for a comprehensive search for warheads.

The meeting was devoted to "stocktaking of inspections," and issues raised by them, presidential advisor Amer al-Saadi, who is in charge of Iraq's disarmament dossier, told reporters.

"Access has been obtained to all sites. This will continue. The Iraq side will encourage persons to accept access also to private sites," Saadi said.

The statement was signed during a working meeting between Blix and Mohamed ElBaradei, director general of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), and Iraqi officials at the foreign ministry.

Saadi described the meeting as "constructive and useful". On Sunday, Blix and ElBaradei hailed "some progress" in talks with Iraq upon their arrival for a 24-hour trip.

They said war was not inevitable but demanded greater cooperation because "time is running out" ahead of their first status report to the UN Security Council, on January 27, since inspections resumed November 27 after a four-year break.

Blix also said senior Iraqi officials during the meeting at the foreign ministry on Sunday came forward with information on the discovery of four new empty chemical warheads.

UN inspectors' spokesman Hiro Ueki said Blix and ElBaradei will "travel today to Athens where they will stay overnight and then leave respectively for New York and

Vienna."

Earlier, UN arms chiefs sought proof of disarmament in talks with Iraq on Monday before making a key report to the UN next week while mooted plans to offer Saddam Hussein exile rather than war won strong US support.

Iraq and the United Nations inspectors went into the second round of meetings reporting "progress".

"We said that they needed to be more proactive in their cooperation, to take the initiative and provide proof of what they have and what remains," said Mohamed ElBaradei, director general of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

"Very good progress" was achieved Sunday "in all areas," Iraq's presidential adviser Amer Al-Saadi said as he went into the foreign ministry where the talks took place.

A smiling Saadi said he was confident the two sides could "complete our work together and hopefully to come out to tell you the good news."

ElBaradei had reported "some progress" Sunday night after he and Blix, head of the UN Monitoring, Verification and Inspection Commission (UNMOVIC), arrived in Baghdad for a 24-hour visit.

Blix said Iraq came forward with information on the discovery of four new empty chemical warheads and a source told AFP more details were expected.

ElBaradei and Blix were due to meet Foreign Minister Naj Sabri for a second time Monday after talks the previous day and then hold a press conference before flying out.

On January 27, they are to present a crucial report to the UN Security Council on Iraq's compliance with the weapons inspections.

UN national security advisor Condoleezza Rice said the

report would probably mark the beginning of a "last phase" for Iraq.

However, the United States offered strong support Sunday to moves to convince the Iraqi president and his top aides to seek exile.

Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld and Secretary of State Colin Powell both said they would encourage exile coupled with an amnesty.

"To avoid a war I would personally recommend that some provision be made so that the senior leadership and their families could be provided haven in some other country," Rumsfeld said.

"I think that that would be a fair trade to avoid a war." Powell agreed, saying exile could constitute the "regime change" in Baghdad that Washington seeks.

"We would have an entirely new situation presented to the international community and we might be able to avoid war," he said.

"So I would encourage Saddam Hussein, if he is getting any messages of this type, to listen to them carefully," said Powell.

Time magazine reported Thursday that Iraq's neighbors hope to orchestrate Saddam's ouster with a broad amnesty for senior officials.

"I think that there is at least a possibility" that the plan could work, Rumsfeld said.

"His neighboring states are in a process now of trying to avoid a conflict there by having him leave the country," Rumsfeld said, although none of the states have officially confirmed it.

N Korea insists on talks, formal pact with US

End to nuke crisis in sight

AFP, Seoul

North Korea insisted on Monday that it would only move to end the crisis over its nuclear program if the United States signed a formal non-aggression pact and agreed to "face-to-face" negotiations.

A commentary by North Korea's official Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) expressed anger that Washington had said it would "talk" with Pyongyang, but not "negotiate" with it.

"In a word, this represented their arrogant attitude that they may have a dialogue with the DPRK (North Korea) but would discuss only how North Korea implements its commitments," KCNA said.

"Dialogue between sovereign states means that they sit face-to-face to settle the divergence of views through negotiations. This is the universal duty and right of both sides."

KCNA then insisted it was Washington's "unavoidable responsibility and moral duty" to sign a legal document guaranteeing it

would not invade North Korea.

The commentary said the United States had made verbal commitments not to take aggressive military action against North Korea, but it had not given any formal guarantees.

"There is no reason why the US should not fix such a guarantee through a legal document," KCNA said.

"If the US wants a dialogue to force the DPRK implementation of commitments only, ignoring its responsibility and duty, there would be no more foolish thinking than this."

US Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage said last week that Washington might issue a non-aggression policy statement with North Korea if it gave up its nuclear arms program.

"We have recently spoken out that we have no hostile intentions," Armitage told Japanese journalists in Washington.

"We are not going to invade North Korea. We believe that there is a way to document this, whether an exchange of letters or official

statement, something like that."

Armitage's comments received support from Japan, one of the nation playing an important role in helping to resolve the crisis.

Meanwhile, North Korean leader Kim Jong-Il's meeting with a foreign envoy for the first time since the nuclear crisis began could signal a new shift in the three-month old crisis, according to some experts here.

Kim's meeting with Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Alexander Losyukov, the bearer of a compromise deal to end the standoff, indicated to some analysts that Kim was preparing to get down to serious talks.

"It looks to be significant because Russia is presenting some form of multi-lateral solution and until now North Korea has maintained that the issue should be a bilateral one with the United States," said Yu Suk-Ryul of the South Korea's Institute of Foreign Affairs and National Security, the foreign ministry's research arm.

Extradition treaties help fight terror: Advani

AFP, New Delhi

More governments are turning to extradition treaties to advance the fight against terror, Indian Deputy Prime Minister Lal Krishna Advani said Monday before leaving for Qatar and France.

His main mission to France, he told Star Television, is to sign an extradition agreement with the French government.

"Terrorism is a global problem and it is not India alone that is having to bear the brunt of it, particularly in Jammu and Kashmir," Advani said, referring to a rebellion by Islamic militants against Indian rule in divided Kashmir state.

"We have been trying to sign with as many countries as possible such treaties, though in the early part of our tenure we made them conscious that terrorism is a global problem," the deputy prime minister said.

"It is not India alone which is having to bear the brunt of terrorism... Now of course after September 11 everyone is conscious of it and so more and more countries are willing to sign treaties which enable them to face the problem."

Indian ports open to 'foreign warships'

THE STATESMAN/ ANN, New Delhi

If war comes to the Middle-east in the near future, US sailors and airman could be using Mumbai and other Indian ports for "logistics and R&R".

Most Indian ports were closed to "foreign warships" for a long while during Operation Parakram, when India nearly went to war with Pakistan.

But now, the restrictions have been lifted and foreign warships involved in a possible war with Iraq, will be able to use Indian ports, if the countries concerned have agreements with India.

India has an agreement with the United States and the US Navy can use Indian ports,

if necessary for things that have no direct military involvement. During war-time, US ships could be using Mumbai, top officials said. The US has no reason to use Mumbai as a military staging point they can use places in the Gulf if they want to and it has to be mentioned that Indian ports were not used even during the Afghan war.

In fact, when India offered all help during the war against the Taliban, the US did not actually accept the invitation. Politico-diplomatic reasons apart, India is too far from the likely fighting zone in any case.

There are perhaps 20 US ships in the North Arabian Sea, part of two super-carrier groups and that means thousands of sailors are involved.

The US sailors could use Indian ports for several reasons. They could need fuel or supplies and that could mean anything not readily available on a ship or even in the Gulf, fresh fruit for instance.

They could also anchor in Mumbai after months at sea to ease battle-fatigue or sheer weariness.

This just does not apply to US ships. It also applies to other countries like Britain or others who are part of the effort against Iraq.

Naval officials said they have been watching the buildup in the North Arabian Sea against Iraq for a while. Officials spoke of the power of the two aircraft-carrier battle-groups.

There are also ships in the eastern Mediterranean and off

Raid on London mosque: several detained

AFP, London

Police on Monday mounted a major raid on a north London mosque frequented by Islamic hardliners, arresting several people under anti-terrorism legislation, police headquarters said, adding that the operation was linked to the recent discovery of a deadly poison in another London raid.

A spokesman at Scotland Yard said the operation against the mosque, in the Finsbury Park district of the capital, had been pre-planned and set up on the basis of intelligence work. He did not say how many people had been detained.

Police also said the raid was linked to the discovery of a deadly toxin called ricin during a raid earlier in the capital earlier this month. That discovery sparked a major security alert.

The Finsbury Park mosque has been the venue for headline sermons given by Abu Hamza al-Masri, a controversial Egyptian-born preacher who has defied the authorities by refusing to tone down his statements.

Libya elected chair of top UN rights body

AFP, Geneva

Libya on Monday was elected chairman of the UN Human Rights Commission in a vote called for by the United States, which had opposed the nomination.

Libyan Ambassador Najat Al-Hajjaji was supported in a secret ballot by 33 members of the 53-nation UN Human Rights Commission, while three countries voted against.

Seventeen members abstained. Libya hailed as a "shining victory" its election Monday as chairman of the UN Human Rights Commission against opposition from the United States, a senior official in Tripoli said.

"It is a shining victory which gives back their rights to the oppressed peoples," foreign ministry spokesman Hassuna al-Shawsh told AFP.

He said Libya's election by a clear majority after a vote demanded by Washington shows "historic world recognition that Libya has a clean sheet with regard to human rights."

Maoists set free 80 abducted children in Nepal

AFP, Kathmandu

The Maoists of Nepal have released 80 students abducted from a school last week in Salyan district, far west of the capital, local reports said Monday.

"The Maoists of Nepal have finally released the abducted 80 school students in Salyan district on Sunday," the district education officer Om Prakash Neupane was quoted by the Nepali daily Kantipur as saying.

The Maoists kidnapped the students aged 15 and 16 from a high school last Friday in Bhalchaur village.

The rebels apparently abducted them to train them for their ongoing guerrilla warfare at Ratamatta in Dang, a Maoist hotbed about 260 km southwest of Kathmandu, the paper said.

Pakistan points finger to India for fuelling arms race in region

Delhi test fires Akash missile again

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistan said Monday it would not be provoked into an arms race with India after its arch nuclear rival conducted its third missile test in 11 days.

"We condemn this. India wants to provoke us in this missile race, and we will not be provoked," Information Minister Sheikh Rashid Ahmed told AFP after India test-fired a surface-to-air Akash missile, its second Akash test since Saturday.

Pakistan last year test-fired five of its own nuclear-capable ballistic missiles including the Ghauri, which on January 8 was formally inducted into the army.

A day later, India test-fired a medium-range ballistic missile capable of carrying a nuclear war-

head into neighbouring Pakistan. Rashid said the 2002 tests were "long ago" and conducted in reaction to Indian tests.

"That was just to prove that we are capable of defending our country also at any cost. We don't want to join this race again."

"We are not a threat to India and we are always saying this, that we want peaceful relations with India." Ahmed said world attention should be drawn to "India's arms race."

"At a time when the world is full of thousands of people rallying for peace, India is giving a different message to the rest of the world," he said.

Pakistan ruled out responding to India's latest missile tests with a test of its own.

Blast derails express train in Assam

AFP, Guwahati

Four coaches of a passenger train derailed Monday in India's northeastern state of Assam after a powerful bomb planted on the tracks exploded, an official said.

The blast occurred as the Kamrup Express was crossing Nailalong in Assam's eastern Karbi Anglong district, 260 km from the state capital Guwahati, a railway spokeswoman said.

The express had some 800 passengers on board and was on its way from Dibrugarh in eastern Assam to Howrah in Kolkata, capital of the eastern Indian state of West Bengal.

"No casualties were reported as the impact of the blast was felt in the front portion of the train. The engine and the luggage and parcel vans and a general compartment were derailed," spokeswoman Leena Shama told AFP.

Passengers were taken to Guwahati by road and railway authorities were making arrangements for their onward journey to Calcutta later in the day, Sharma said.



PHOTO: AFP
Indian Bollywood superstar Amitabh Bachchan (2nd L) and his son Abhishek (L) perform final rites for Amitabh's father Harivansh Rai Bachchan ahead of the cremation in Mumbai on Sunday. Harivansh Rai, 96, died on Saturday night after a prolonged illness.

'Chicago', 'The Hours' steal top Golden Globe honours

AFP, Beverly Hills

"Chicago," a simmering musical tale of murder and lust in the 1920s, and the complex drama "The Hours" snatched the best movie honours at the 2003 Golden Globe Awards on Sunday.

The two films, which began the 60th annual Golden Globes party as the evening's firm favourites, pulled ahead at the last minute in one of the tightest races in years, putting them in poll position for the Oscars.

The Globes are Hollywood's second most prestigious award and are often seen as a key barometer of which films will go on to win cinema's greatest prize, the Academy Awards, nominations for which will be unveiled in three weeks.

The eight-times nominated "Chicago" danced off with the award for best musical or comedy

as well as twin best actor plaudits for unlikely stars Renee Zellweger and Richard Gere, becoming the most honoured film of the evening.

"The Hours," a desperate tale of three women linked in time by the work of British author Virginia Woolf, won best drama as well as best dramatic actress for star Nicole Kidman, her second consecutive best actress win at the Globes.

Veteran star Jack Nicholson made history by winning his sixth best actor Globe -- the most ever won by an actor -- for his role as a retiring insurance agent reassessing his life in the bitter-sweet drama "About Schmidt."

For her role as Woolf, the 35-year-old Australian Kidman donned a prosthetic nose and British accent, rendering her practically unrecognizable and prompting good-natured ribbing by Nicholson.



PHOTO: AFP
Actresses Meryl Streep (L) and Nicole Kidman (R) pose with their awards at the 60th Annual Golden Globe Awards on Sunday in Beverly Hills, California. Streep won for Best Performance by an Actress in a Supporting Role in a Motion Picture for "Adaptation" and Kidman won for Best Performance by an Actress in a Motion Picture-Drama for "The Hours."

Sharon snubs quartet's ME peace roadmap

REUTERS, Jerusalem

Prime Minister Ariel Sharon said on Sunday that European members of a "quartet" of foreign mediators were biased against Israel and would stall peace efforts unless they backed the removal of Yasser Arafat.

In a meeting with foreign reporters, Sharon singled out the European Union for not taking a balanced view of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and for failing to understand that "to move things forward, (Palestinian President) Arafat should be removed from any influential position."

The quartet -- the United States, European Union, United Nations and Russia -- has yet to release its final "road map" to ending more than two years of Middle East violence. But Sharon's remarks could

undermine its future effectiveness. Palestinians said the Israeli leader's comments showed he had no real plans to settle the conflict.

"We see eye-to-eye with the United States and not always with the other members," Sharon said regarding the blueprint for peace. The United States has called on Palestinians to replace Arafat as their leader in elections and carry out reforms.

"We don't underestimate Europe," Sharon said. "I would like to see very much more involvement on the European side in what's happening here, but I have one condition...your attitude toward Israel and the Arabs and Palestinians should be balanced."

Sharon's remarks clarified an interview with the US magazine Newsweek in which he was quoted as saying the quartet's "road map"

to peace should not be taken seriously.

Sharon faces a general election on January 28 and tough talk against the Palestinians is proving popular among voters rattled by Palestinian suicide bombings and other attacks in a 27-month uprising for an independent state.

In the latest violence, Israelis burying a Jewish settler killed by Palestinian militants went on the rampage in the West Bank city of Hebron, smashing the windows of Palestinian homes and setting cars alight. Several people were injured.

In the interview with Newsweek, Sharon said: "Oh, the quartet is nothing! Don't take it seriously! There is (another) plan that will work."

Thousands flee fresh fighting in Burundi

AFP, Bujumbura

Over 15,000 civilians in Burundi have fled a fresh outbreak of fighting between government troops and Hutu rebels in the central Gitega province, an administrative official said on Sunday.

Troops set up outposts seven kilometers (four miles) out of Gitega, the central African country's second-largest city, and were shelling rebel strongholds in the hills, local governor Tharcisse Ntibarirana told AFP.

"The army is avoiding fighting and is in the process of shelling the hills", rebel spokesman Lieutenant Gelase Daniel Ndirabire, from the Forces for the Defence of Democracy (FDD) told AFP by telephone.

"This has only affected the civilian population which is fleeing these zones," he said.