



PHOTO: AFP

Iraqi Shiite men rally in Basra, southern Iraq on Saturday. Some 2,000 Iraqi Shiite Muslims marched in Basra to demand the withdrawal of British occupation forces from Iraq's main southern city.

Israel cordons off WB as radicals uphold Intifada

AFP, Jerusalem

Israel on Saturday reimposed its tight control over the West Bank, military officials here said, as Palestinian radicals vowed to continue their armed Intifada against Israel.

Israeli officials said the decision had been taken by Defence Minister Shaul Mofaz following warnings of terrorist attacks.

The bombing alerts were a consequence of radical Palestinian movements rejecting the Aqaba summit between President George W. Bush and Israeli and Palestinian leaders, the sources said.

In the summit Wednesday in the Jordanian Red Sea resort of Aqaba Israeli and Palestinian leaders formally signed on to the roadmap for peace that provides for confidence-building measures leading to a Palestinian state in 2005 side-by-side with a secure Israel.

Meanwhile, a participant at a joint meeting in Gaza City of Palestinian radical groups said five movements would continue their armed Intifada against Israel.

"We decided to pursue the armed Intifada because we reject the conclusions of the Aqaba summit where resistance was equated with terrorism," Mohammed el-Hindi of the Islamic Jihad told AFP.

At the summit with his Israeli counterpart Ariel Sharon and Bush, Palestinian Prime Minister Mahmud Abbas, also known as Abu Mazen, declared there was "no military solution" to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and called for an end to the "armed Intifada."

Among the groups which attended Saturday's meeting with the Islamic Jihad were the hardline Islamic movement Hamas, Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat's Fatah as well as the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine and the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine.

The Palestinian factions' meeting comes ahead of another one set for this week, according to the Palestinian Authority, between Abbas and the factions.

"We succeeded in discussing the recent summits while waiting for clarifications which will be provided

by Abu Mazen," Ibrahim Abu Naja, a spokesman for the umbrella organisation which groups all the factions, told reporters earlier, using the premier's nickname.

"The intra-Palestinian differences on the questions raised (at the summits) should not prevent us from gathering and discussing them," he said.

The renewed clampdown on the West Bank came after the Israeli army eased its control over Palestinian territories a week ago, announcing it had agreed to a phased handover of security control in Gaza and West Bank towns to the Palestinians, following talks between Sharon and Abbas.

At their meeting, Sharon offered the Palestinians a partial and staged army withdrawal from reoccupied West Bank cities and sections of the Gaza Strip in a show of a good will.

This would allow some 25,000 Palestinians to work in Israel, according to an official communiqué.

On May 18, Israel slapped a complete closure on the West Bank and Gaza Strip after a spate of

Palestinian attacks.

Since the start of the Intifada in September 2000, the vast majority of Palestinians have been refused entry to Israel with catastrophic effects on employment for 250,000 Palestinians previously working in Israel with or without permits.

Looking to end the furore over Aqaba, Abbas is to meet with all Palestinian factions this week, culture minister Ziad Abu Amr told AFP following a cabinet meeting in the West Bank city of Ramallah.

"Talks will be resumed this week and we will remove the reason that stopped the dialogue," he said.

As Abbas prepared for further meetings, reports emerged that his security chief Mohammed Dahlan was to offer militant groups 6,000 dollars apiece for their guns in a bid to rid the territories of illegal arms.

According to Israeli public radio, Dahlan has received money from the US and British governments and from the European Union to fund the programme.

'Saddam ran chemical labs, but made no weapons'

AFP, Baghdad

Saddam Hussein's intelligence agencies ran a network of secret cells that carried out chemical and biological research but produced no weapons, The Sunday Times reported, quoting a top Iraqi security official.

The British newspaper said a general who procured supplies for the programme through an international network of front companies had told it that laboratories were hidden in basements in houses around Baghdad.

"But it was all just theory. The aim was to keep us up to date and ready so that if (United Nations) sanctions were lifted or we needed to produce chemical or biological weapons again, we could start up immediately," the unnamed general said.

The Sunday Times report came amid ongoing allegations that British Prime Minister Tony Blair and US President George W. Bush exaggerated the threat of Iraqi weapons of mass destruction to justify going to war.

The general insisted that search teams would find no weapons. "I challenge anyone in Iraq, from north to south, to find anything," he told The Sunday Times.

According to the general, a research programme was set up in 1996 with members of the Mukhabarat intelligence agency and the Special Security Organisation.

In Britain, Blair has been dodging allegations, originating from a BBC radio report, that his aides "sexed up" a report last September on Iraq's weapons, despite reservations by intelligence chiefs.

A separate government dossier

published at the beginning of this year provoked a furore when it emerged that parts of it were lifted via the internet from a 12-year-old thesis by a United States student.

Downing Street said that in the wake of that report, senior communications chief Alastair Campbell, who is close to Blair, had reassured intelligence services that the government would take "far greater care" in using their material.

Downing Street was responding to a report in the Sunday Telegraph that Campbell had apologised to security chiefs who were angered that government officials had added elements to intelligence reports.

The Sunday Express reported that the heads of Britain's foreign and domestic intelligence services threatened to resign in September, alleging that Downing Street had exaggerated the importance of an uncorroborated report that Iraq could deploy chemical or biological weapons in just 45 minutes.

A double resignation at a crucial time in the run-up to war could have brought Blair down, but the pair were persuaded to stay by senior government officials, the newspaper said.

The Express added, however, that its story, based on information from unnamed government sources, was denied by Downing Street, the Foreign Office and the Home Office.

Meanwhile, The Sunday Times reported that Blair's office scrapped a third dossier drawn up by intelligence officials in March 2002 because it failed to establish that Saddam posed a growing threat.

Shiites demands British pullout from Basra

AFP, Basra

Some 2,000 Iraqi Shiite Muslims marched in Basra Saturday to demand the withdrawal of British occupation forces from Iraq's main southern city.

"Leave peacefully lest we expel you through our jihad (holy war)," they chanted in front of the headquarters of the British military command controlling southern Iraq, an AFP reporter witnessed.

"No to (British Prime Minister) Tony Blair, no to Satan," shouted the protesters, led by clerics.

The demonstrators, who rallied

at the behest of an organisation named after Ayatollah Mohammed Sadeq al-Sadr, a leading Shiite religious authority whose 1999 assassination was blamed on Saddam Hussein's deposed regime, handed British officers a petition demanding a British pullout to the outskirts of the city.

The petition also called for "Iraqi national committees to be allowed to ensure law and order in Basra province" and for the abrogation of UN Security Council Resolution 1483 adopted last month on grounds that it legitimised the occupation of Iraq.

Treasures of Nimrud found in Iraqi vault

AP, Baghdad

The world-famous treasures of Nimrud, unaccounted for since Baghdad fell two months ago, have been located in good condition in the country's Central Bank in a secret vault-inside-a-vault submerged in sewage water, US occupation authorities said Saturday.

They also said fewer than 50 items from the collection of the Iraqi National Museum's main exhibition are still missing after the looting and destruction that followed the US capture of Baghdad.

Bush, Blair feel WMD heat

AP, Washington

Before the war, the Bush administration portrayed Iraq as full of killer poisons with strange names and deadly effects, which terrorists could get hold of and unleash on US cities. Those claims and fears have not been borne out so far.

Was the intelligence regarding Iraq inaccurate or distorted between when it was gathered and presented to the world? Congress is looking into the matter. Prime Minister Tony Blair's government in Britain is facing similar scrutiny.

A former State Department intelligence official, who viewed classified intelligence gathered by the CIA and other agencies about

Iraq's chemical, biological and nuclear programs during the run-up to the war, accused the administration of distorting intelligence and presenting conjecture as fact.

"What disturbs me deeply is what I think are the disingenuous statements made from the very top about what the intelligence did say," said Greg Thielmann, who retired in September. He was director of the strategic, proliferation and military issues office in the State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research.

On Friday, the head of the Defence Intelligence Agency acknowledged he had no hard evidence of Iraqi chemical weapons last fall but believed Iraq had a

program in place to produce them. The assessment suggests greater uncertainty about the Iraqi threat than the administration indicated publicly.

CIA Director George Tenet, Secretary of State Colin Powell and top Pentagon officials have defended their pieces of the intelligence picture, saying they provided accurate assessments.

Many top US officials contend their pre-war assertions will yet be borne out. They say Iraq remains too dangerous to conduct a thorough search, but a new hunt is getting underway.

UN experts check out Iraq's nuclear site

US troops ambushed in Saddam's hometown

REUTERS, Tuwaitha

UN nuclear experts in white protective suits surveyed a looted storage facility at Iraq's main nuclear site Sunday, witnesses said.

A Reuters cameraman said the seven-member International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) team was working under tight US military escort at the vast Tuwaitha site, about 20 km south of Baghdad.

US soldiers confiscated the cameraman's video, saying no media coverage was permitted near the nuclear research compound.

The IAEA team arrived in Iraq Friday on a limited mission to check on looting from the site where low-enriched uranium, known as yellow

cake, was stored in barrels.

Looters emptied some of the barrels and sold them to local people for \$2 each. US forces say they paid \$3 a barrel to recover the stolen items and five radiological devices.

Some locals who unwittingly washed clothes or stored food in the barrels say children are falling ill, but IAEA and US military officials say they believe the health risk is low.

The IAEA team is operating under strict guidelines from the Pentagon, which does not want to open the door to a renewed role for the agency in post-war Iraq.

The United States is expanding its own team to hunt for Saddam Hussein's alleged arsenal of weapons of mass destruction and wants

to exclude the IAEA and other UN arms inspectors.

The failure of the United States and Britain to find any banned weapons since their March 20 invasion has fuelled a political furore over whether they misled the world by arguing that Iraq posed a deadly threat to international security.

Meanwhile, US troops were ambushed near Saddam Hussein's hometown Saturday, as UN nuclear experts began work to assess looting at Iraq's main nuclear facility.

The US military said a soldier died and four were wounded when gunmen fired small arms and a rocket-propelled grenade at them near Tikrit, 110 miles north of Baghdad.



PHOTO: AFP

A US Army convoy leads a bus carrying seven scientists from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) into the Tuwaitha nuclear plant on Saturday near Baghdad, as an Iraqi man paints the gates. The UN nuclear experts began inspecting Iraq's largest nuclear facility amid fears that thousands of local residents may have been poisoned as a result of looting at the site.

Coup attempt averted in Mauritania

AFP, Nouakchott

An attempted coup by elements of the Mauritanian army was put down early Sunday in the west African country, a source close to the government said.

Mauritanian President Maaouiya Ould Taya and his family were safe and in good health, the source said.

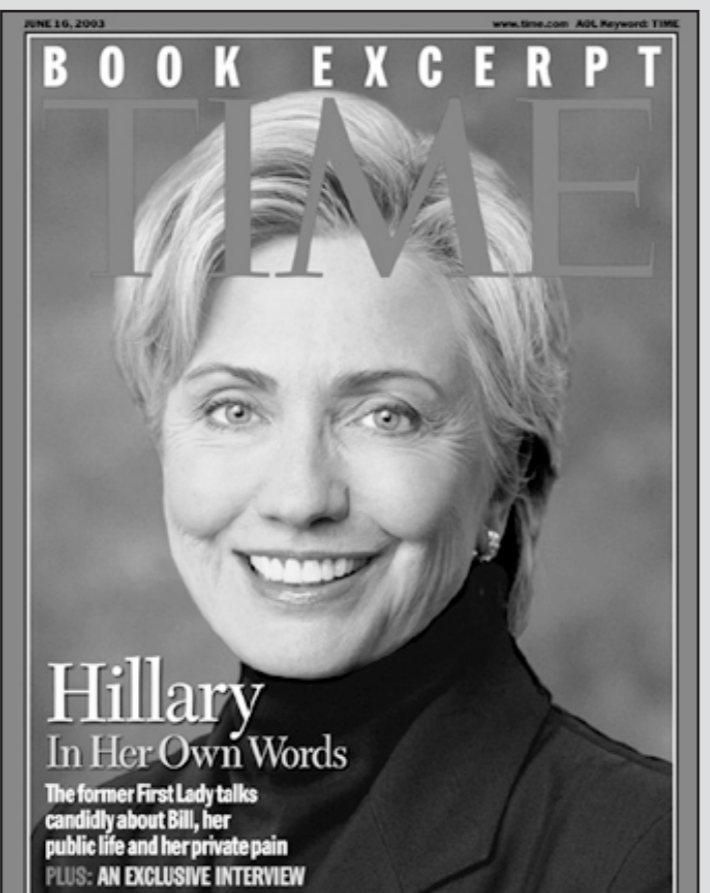
Some sporadic shooting was still to be heard in the south of the capital Nouakchott at around 5:30 am (0530 GMT) near a tank regiment base, according to local residents contacted by telephone, implying that soldiers loyal to the government were still meeting pockets of resistance.

But the situation appeared to have calmed down around the presidential building and army headquarters in the centre of the capital, where automatic weapons fire and explosions had been concentrated during the night.

Some witnesses said a plane had flown over the city several times sparking off anti-aircraft fire. Shooting was also reported around the television broadcasting centres in the far northwest of the city.

National radio and television had not broadcast any news of the attempted coup by the early morning, and it was not known which parts of the army had taken part, but the anti-aircraft fire suggested elements of the air force could have been involved.

Hillary still loves Bill



AFP, Washington

Despite having wanted to wring his neck after learning of his affair with Monica Lewinsky, former US first lady Hillary Rodham Clinton admits she still loves Bill Clinton and believes he is "the most interesting" man she has ever met, according to excerpts from her memoir.

Time magazine released portions of the upcoming book "Living History," due out Monday, in which the US senator from New York recalls the ups and downs of an eight-year White House reign marked by a period of economic prosperity but also a series of ethics scandals.

The most threatening was Clinton's affair with then-White House intern Lewinsky, which resulted in his impeachment by the House of Representatives on charges of perjury and obstruction of justice, and his narrow acquittal by the Senate.

Only one other president in US history - Andrew Johnson, in 1868 - was impeached, tried and acquitted. No US president has ever been removed from office by the procedure.

Hillary Clinton said she was "dumbfounded, heartbroken and outraged" and "wanted to wring Bill's neck" when he admitted the affair to her, immediately before testifying before a grand jury on the matter in August 1998.

Time shows the June 16 cover of the magazine featuring former US first lady Hillary Clinton. Clinton's book "Living History," an account of her stormy White House years, is due in bookstores on June 16. Hillary Clinton, 55, reportedly received an eight million dollar advance for the book.

13,000 Arab Muslim men face deportation from US

AFP, Washington

About 16 percent of Arab and Muslim men who voluntarily came forward to register with the US government are illegal immigrants who may now face deportation, The New York Times reported Saturday.

That is likely to produce the largest wave of deportations of Arab and Muslim men from the United States since the September 11, 2001, attacks, the paper said.

Since that time, the US government has instituted much tighter controls on foreigners living on US soil, attempting to weed out suspected "terrorists" or prevent them from entering the country.

Hence a special registration program required non-citizen men from 25 Arab and Muslim countries to register with US immigration authorities between December and April of this year.

Of the 82,000 who came forward, more than 13,000 were found to be in the United States illegally and now face deportation, the Times said.

But of those 82,000 men and "tens of thousands more screened at airports and border crossings" in the past six months, only 11 had links to "terrorism," it said.

Many came forward in false hopes their cooperation would result in leniency on the part of immigration officials.

"People did register out of their good conscience, because they

wanted to follow the rules, respect the law," Fayiz Rahman of the American Muslim Council told AFP.

He charged that Attorney General John Ashcroft's policy is "targeted only towards Muslims."

"This is a major concern," he stressed. "They are planning to reduce the number of Muslims on American soil, ... discourage Muslim immigration, make our lives difficult."

Other critics also say the policies are discriminatory.

"What the government is doing is very aggressively targeting particular nationalities for enforcement of immigration law," the paper quoted Lucas Guttentag of the American Civil Liberties Union as saying.

"The identical violation committed by, say, a Mexican immigrant is not enforced in the same way."

Many immigrants rounded up after the September 11 attacks were chained, physically and verbally abused, held without bail and denied access to lawyers, according to a Justice Department report released Monday.

"While our review recognised the enormous challenges and difficult circumstances confronting the department in responding to the terrorist attacks, we found significant problems in the way the detainees were handled," said the report by Justice Department Inspector General Glenn Fine.