

US troops move to stamp out Iraqi resistance

Soldiers face danger in Iraq: Bush

REUTERS, Ramadi

Ramming their vehicles against metal gates, US troops in Iraq raided the homes of suspected guerrillas on Saturday as part of a campaign to stamp out armed resistance to their occupation.

Soldiers from the First Battalion of the 124th Infantry Regiment staged the operation shortly after sunrise in a suburb of the city of Ramadi, around 100 km west of Baghdad in a region where US forces have frequently come under fire.

Officers said they aimed to capture five men belonging to the Fedayeen paramilitary force, which put up some of the fiercest resistance to US troops during the invasion and has been blamed for continuing attacks since Saddam Hussein's fall.

The raid, involving several hundred soldiers, was part of Operation Desert Scorpion, launched on June 15. It aims to crack down on guerrillas with combat missions and to befriend civilians by helping with aid and recon-

struction projects.

One unit of soldiers dragged half a dozen Iraqi men from their homes as women wailed in protest.

Officers were checking to see if the men were the suspects they sought. The troops also confiscated a handful of weapons and a computer hard disk.

A final tally of the suspects and weapons seized was not immediately available.

Paul Bremer, Iraq's US ruler, has said elements loyal to Saddam are exploiting their chief's uncertain fate to intimidate Iraqis, and attacking US troops to destabilize the country.

Seventeen American soldiers have been killed in hostile action in Iraq since President Bush declared major combat over on May 1. No Iraqi death toll is available.

AFP adds: President George W. Bush warned Saturday that the US forces in Iraq face a future of "danger and sacrifice" before the country is secure.

Bush, in his weekly radio address, also reaffirmed his determination that Saddam Hussein's

weapons of mass destruction would be found.

"Making Iraq secure is vitally important for both Iraqi citizens and our own forces," Bush said after a week in which a growing number of US military dead in Iraq began to raise questions in Congress.

"The men and women of our military face a continuing risk of danger and sacrifice in Iraq."

"Dangerous pockets of the old regime remain loyal to it and they, along with their terrorist allies, are behind deadly attacks designed to kill and intimidate coalition forces and innocent Iraqis."

The United States invaded Iraq on March 20 and Saddam's regime in Baghdad fell 10 weeks ago.

But in the time since then no chemical or biological weapons programs have been recovered. Amidst allegations that intelligence on Iraq's weapons was overstated to bolster the case for war, the lack of evidence has caused major political problems for British Prime Minister Tony Blair and to a lesser extent the Bush administration.

"As we establish order and justice in Iraq, we also continue to pursue Saddam Hussein's weapons of mass destruction," Bush went on.

"Military and intelligence officials are interviewing scientists with knowledge of Saddam Hussein's weapons programs and are poring over hundreds of thousands of documents.

"For more than a decade, Saddam Hussein went to great lengths to hide his weapons from the world. And in the regime's final days, documents and suspected weapons sites were looted and burned.

"Yet all who know the dictator's history agree that he possessed chemical and biological weapons and that he used chemical weapons in the past.

"The intelligence services of many nations concluded that he had illegal weapons and the regime refused to provide evidence they had been destroyed. We are determined to discover the true extent of Saddam Hussein's weapons programs, no matter how long it takes."



PHOTO: AFP
Iraqi Shiite Muslims march to the entrance of the US-led coalition forces offices in Baghdad on Saturday. Demonstrators handed a petition to the US administration, demanding that the Hawza Shiite authority play a supervisory role in the rapid establishment of local councils and the top authority to supervise the formation of an Iraqi government. They also demanded role in "the release of those held by the US administration, the rapid flow of humanitarian aid and for coalition forces to change their attitude toward Iraqis."

PAKISTAN INDIA PEOPLES FORUM FOR PEACE & DEMOCRACY ISLAMABAD CHAPT

WELCOMES

PARLIAMENTARIANS FROM INDIA

THE PEOPLE WANT PEACE FRIENDSHIP

PHOTO: AFP
Visiting Indian parliamentarian Kuldip Nayyar (C-with glasses) and his team attend a ceremony in Islamabad on Friday. Nayyar, who is leading a 12-member Indian parliamentarians for a visit in Pakistan, urged Islamabad and New Delhi to end hostilities and promote trade and economic cooperation to end poverty in the nuclear-armed rival neighbours.

300 opposition activists detained in Pak Kashmir

AP, Muzaffarabad

Police in Pakistan occupied Kashmir on Saturday arrested nearly 300 activists of a key opposition party in a bid to stop a protest against the region's top elected leader, police said.

Most of the arrests were made in Muzaffarabad, the capital of Pakistan occupied Kashmir, as the demonstrators gathered before a planned march to the parliament building, where they wanted to hold the rally, police Deputy Superintendent Ghulam Sarwar said. India and Pakistan have recently made peace overtures, and indicated they would be willing to discuss the future of the region. Last month, the top elected official in PoK, Prime Minister Sardar Sikandar Hayyat, floated the idea of dividing Kashmir permanently on the basis of religion.

Iran defies int'l pressure on nuclear aims

REUTERS, Tehran/London

Iran said on Saturday it would not allow UN inspectors to take samples at an alleged nuclear plant, as Washington warned it reserved the right to use military action to stop Tehran making atomic weapons.

The Islamic republic, sandwiched between Iraq and Afghanistan where US forces now have a strong foothold, accused Washington of waging a baseless propaganda campaign that Tehran had a secret program to develop nuclear arms.

Gholamreza Aghazadeh, head of Iran's Atomic Energy organization, said allowing inspectors from the UN nuclear watchdog to take samples at the Kelaye Electric Company in Tehran would expose Iran to a rash of similar requests.

"We've had no problem concerning environmental samples, but

we've been telling the IAEA (International Atomic Energy Agency) that this location is a non-nuclear location," Aghazadeh told state television.

The IAEA on Thursday urged Iran to remain "transparent" and accept without delay or conditions more intrusive, short-notice inspections. The Kelaye facility was cited by the IAEA.

President Bush has stepped up a campaign to force Iran to come clean over its nuclear ambitions, and a top US official said on Friday military action remained an option but was relatively low down the agenda.

John Bolton, a leading member of Bush's administration, told BBC radio: "The president has repeatedly said that all options are on the table, but (military action) is not only our preference, it is far, far from our minds."

But when pressed on the issue, the undersecretary of state for arms control and international security, said: "It has to be an option."

In Amman, US Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Richard Lugar said: "My own viewpoint is that our president... (has) emphasized the diplomatic route."

Washington seized on a statement by the IAEA on Thursday criticizing what it said was Iran's failure to comply with agreements designed to prevent the use of its civilian nuclear resources to make atomic weapons.

The United States has demanded that Iran must abide by a nuclear non-proliferation treaty and sign a new protocol that would allow snap inspections.

12 killed in separatist violence in Assam

AFP, Guwahati

At least 12 people including 10 tribal separatists were killed in India's northeastern state of Assam where rebels set off an explosion under a freight train and attacked an oil installation, officials said Saturday.

An army spokesman said troops shot dead seven militants of the outlawed Hmar People's Convention (HPC) Friday in the Cachar district, 350 km southeast of the state capital Guwahati.

"The HPC rebels numbering about 10 were holed up inside a fortified bunker when our troops launched a raid on their hideout, killing seven militants," the army official said.

A large quantity of arms and ammunition, including AK-47 assault rifles, was recovered from the dead militants, he said.

Powell unable to advance sagging ME peace plan

REUTERS, Jerusalem

Secretary of State Colin Powell failed Friday to break a logjam in efforts to advance a new Middle East peace plan and he urged wary Israelis and Palestinian for urgent steps to save it.

Powell met Israeli and Palestinian leaders in an effort to revive the US-backed peace "road map" as more bloodshed erupted, with a Jewish settler killed in the West Bank and three people wounded when Palestinian gunmen ambushed their car.

Hamas's military wing said it was responsible for the attack in a statement faxed to media in the West Bank. Two of the injured were elderly US citizens visiting relatives.

In the Gaza Strip, Palestinian medics and witnesses said Israeli troops killed a Palestinian gunman in an exchange of fire near a Jewish settlement. The army had no comment.

Powell's eight-hour stint of shuttle diplomacy gave him a

chance to lean on both sides to fulfil commitments made at a June 4 summit in Jordan with President Bush, but it yielded no breakthroughs.

"We have to move urgently," Powell said after his talks Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and Palestinian Prime Minister Mahmoud Abbas. "We don't want time to pass without action taking place... We don't want terrorists to win."

US sources in Washington said later that Bush's national security adviser Condoleezza Rice, co-managing "road map" efforts with Powell, would come to the region next week for follow-up consultations with the parties.

US officials said Gaza, Hamas's densely populated stronghold and subject to repeated Israeli incursions and air strikes, was under discussion for possible transfer to Palestinian security control to advance the road map.

Major-General Amos Gilad, Israel's military coordinator in occu-

pled territories, confirmed this in an Israeli television interview but said Palestinians "must take responsibility for fighting terror" first.

Powell pressed Palestinian Prime Minister Mahmoud Abbas not just to strike a cease-fire with Hamas and other militant groups but to eliminate their capacity to attack Israelis.

That would probably entail disarming and jailing them, a step Abbas is loath to attempt for fear of civil war.

Abbas told reporters after seeing Powell peace efforts would come to naught unless Israel halted incursions and blockades.

Militants also demand an Israeli release of prisoners as another condition for a truce and say any such deal would cover only civilians in Israel not settlers and soldiers in occupied territory - leaving a Gaza pullout unlikely for the time being.

Michael Krepon of the Henry L. Stimson Centre, a Washington-DC based think tank, told the media: "India and China still do not have

Vajpayee's China trip under US scanner

IANIS, Washington

Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee's visit to China from Sunday is being viewed by strategic analysts here both for its potential to change the region's geopolitical dynamics and for its impact on their ties with the US.

Will economic cooperation bring the wary Asian neighbours closer to overcoming their decades-old differences and is China's interest in improving relations with India the result of the recent strengthening of US-India ties - these are some of the questions posed by analysts here.

There are doubts on how close the two could move towards normal political relations, which have been dogged by India's accusations of Chinese overt or covert help to Pakistan's nuclear and missile capability and Chinese apprehensions about India's shelter to the Dalai Lama and 120,000 exiles from Tibet.

Michael Krepon of the Henry L. Stimson Centre, a Washington-DC based think tank, told the media: "India and China still do not have

normal relations. They have not settled on their international border, and they do not talk substantively about nuclear and missile matters. I hope that the Vajpayee visit can impart added momentum toward normalisation in these two key areas."

Vajpayee is visiting China from Sunday to Friday.

Dennis Kux of the Woodrow Wilson Centre and a scholar on South Asia said: "Vajpayee's visit is a part of a long-term effort under way to mend fences between Asia's two largest countries. In the past decade, the two sides have exchanged high level visits, have seen a significant rise in bilateral trade, and have gradually improved political relations."

He said the visit is "another significant step in this process. While India and China have made little progress in settling their dispute over their frontiers, which triggered the border war in October-November 1962, they have largely put this to one side and proceeded in improving other facets of their relationship."

BJP ally rejects troops for Iraq ahead of talks with PM

AFP, New Delhi

Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee was Saturday consulting his security cabinet and coalition allies on whether to send troops to Iraq as a key government ally lashed out at any plans to join a US-led force.

Vajpayee was to meet his top security cabinet late Saturday followed by separate talks with the two dozen parties in his coalition, a government spokesman said.

However, no date has been set to announce a decision and Vajpayee leaves Sunday on a six-day visit to China.

While some of the premier's top aides seem to be leaning towards the US request for troops, there is stiff resistance both from opposition parties and members of Vajpayee's Hindu nationalist BJP party who

argue that Indian troops must only come under the UN flag, not US-British command.

Just hours before the meeting, Bal Thackeray, chief of the far-right Hindu party Shiv Sena which is part of the coalition, urged Vajpayee to reject the "US pressure" to send troops.

"Did America ask us when it attacked Iraq?" Thackeray told his party's mouthpiece Samna (Confrontation).

"Why then should we oblige? Sending troops to Iraq at America's behest would be very foolish," he said.

"Turning down the American request for troops is the only way to show self-respect. Accepting the American demand is not in the interests of the nation," he said.

US slams filing of war crimes charges against Bush, Blair

AFP, Washington

The United States took aim Friday at Belgium's law allowing its courts to hear cases involving war crimes and genocide against anyone after such charges were filed against President George W. Bush and other US officials.

"As we have repeatedly said, Belgium's universal competence law makes it possible for people with a political agenda to put American officials, as well as other nations' leaders, at risk. It's becoming difficult, I think, for our leaders to travel freely to Belgium," said State Department deputy spokesman Philip Reeker.

Reeker stressed that "the law doesn't work. We think it should be repealed. And that's our view. It's a view we've held and a view we'll continue to hold."



PHOTO: AFP
Member of pro-independence Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) Noor Mohammed Kawal (L) collects signatures in support of a campaign calling for Kashmiris to play a role in talks on the region's future in Srinagar on Saturday. Yasin Malik, head of the JKLF, began the signature campaign on June 11 and was arrested a day after in the central Kashmir town of Anantnag along with two close aides, Javed Mir and Noor Mohammed Kawal.