

'Failure to find Iraqi WMDs delays report publication'

AFP, London

The United States and Britain have decided to delay indefinitely the publication of a full report on Iraq's weapons of mass destruction after inspectors found no evidence that any such arms exist, a Sunday newspaper reported.

The London-based Sunday Times said efforts by the Iraq Survey Group, an Anglo-American team of 1,400 scientists, military and intelligence experts, to scour Iraq for the past four months to uncover evidence of chemical or biological weapons had so far ended in failure.

The newspaper reported British defence intelligence sources had confirmed that the group's final report, which is to be submitted to George Tenet, head of the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), had been delayed and may not necessarily even be published.

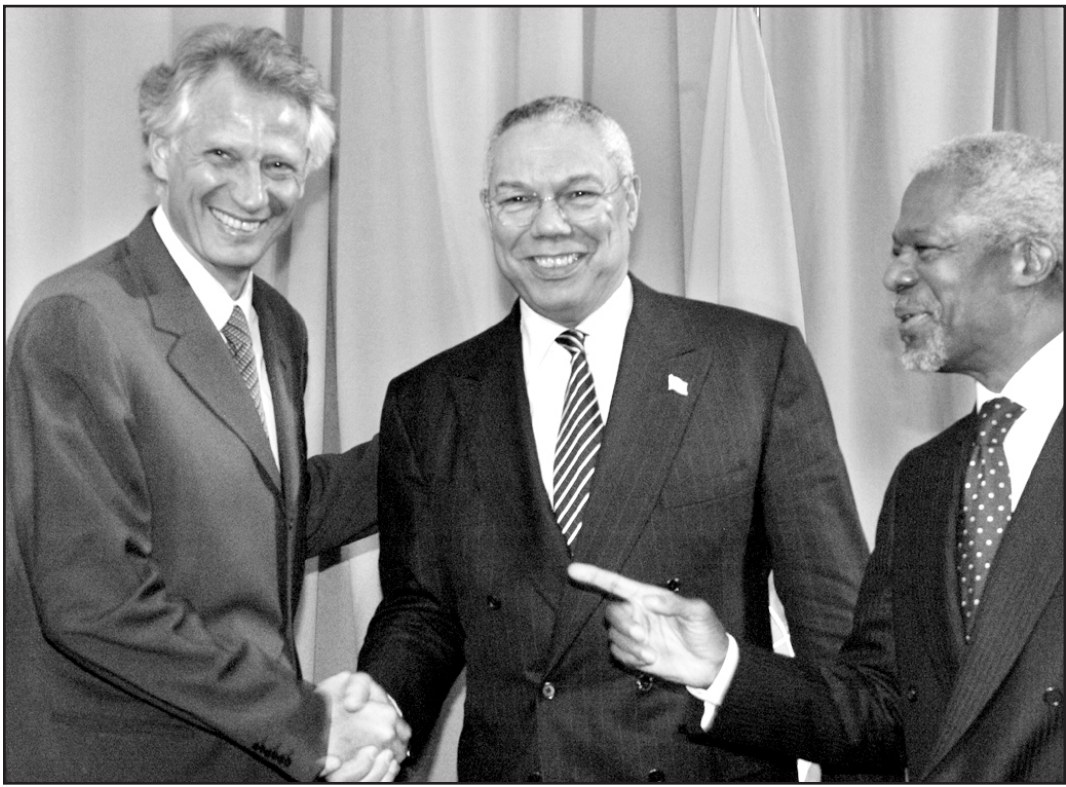


PHOTO: AFP

French Foreign Minister Dominique De Villepin (L) poses with his US counterpart, Clayton Powell (C), and United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan (R) after a press conference, winding up an emergency meeting on Iraq by the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council in Geneva Saturday.

UN Big-5's talks on Iraq inconclusive

France, US remain poles apart though Powell reports progress

REUTERS, AP, Baghdad/ Geneva

Secretary of State Colin Powell flew into Baghdad yesterday after largely inconclusive talks with the other major powers on the future of occupied Iraq.

Powell is the highest ranking US official to visit Iraq since US-led forces overthrew the government of President Saddam Hussein in April. He flew in from neighbouring Kuwait on a US military aircraft and was met at the airport by Paul Bremer, head of the US-led administration in Iraq.

Powell will meet the Iraqi politicians on whom the United States is pinning its hopes for a peaceful transition so that Washington can start cutting the high costs of the

occupation.

"In Iraq, he will meet with Iraqi and with members of the Coalition Provisional Authority in order to see first hand the progress being made by the international community and by the Iraqi people in rebuilding their nation," a State Department spokesman said on Saturday, announcing the visit.

With US-led forces in Iraq taking casualties almost every day and the cost of occupation mounting, Washington sees a new UN resolution it has drafted as a way to coax other countries to pitch in with cash and troops.

But there was no consensus on the resolution after Powell's talks in Geneva on Saturday with foreign

ministers of the other permanent members of the United Nations Security Council Britain, China, France and Russia.

France and the United States are poles apart on how quickly power should be returned to the Iraqi people.

Powell outranks Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, until now the highest ranking US official to have visited Baghdad since the fall of Saddam.

AP adds: Secretary of State Colin Powell said Saturday the five veto-wielding members of the UN Security Council narrowed their differences on a new Iraq resolution and he was "encouraged" by the progress.

But he also made it plain there still were big gaps with France on how and when to give Iraqis responsibility to govern. Powell arrived in Kuwait early Sunday and will soon be headed to Iraq - where he will become the highest-ranking American official to visit the country since the war.

Speaking after talks in Geneva mediated by UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, Powell said he hoped there would be an additional convergence of views in negotiations resuming next week in New York, where world leaders will gather for the UN General Assembly later this month.

14 killed during clashes with Maoists in Nepal

AFP, Kathmandu

Eight Maoist rebels, three members of the security forces and three civilians have been killed in clashes in Nepal in the past 48 hours, a security source said on Sunday.

"Five rebels were killed at Kalinjor in the southern Sarlahi district and another one at Helauchha in (eastern) Bhojpur district following an exchange of fire between the rebels and the security personnel on Saturday," the source said.

Two other guerrillas were killed in Haraicha village in eastern Dhanakuta district's Maleha village in the southeastern Saptari area on Saturday afternoon, the source added.

The rebels had gunned down three civilians and a police constable, Lal Bahadur Tamang, at Sijjuwa police post in Saptari in the last 48 hours, the source said.

India asks Musharraf to be bold to fight terror

Pakistan calls for regional force to control militancy

AFP, New Delhi

Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf, denounced by al-Qaeda as a "traitor", should be bold enough to join India as an ally against terrorism, India's foreign minister said at the weekend.

"By all means. I have no hesitation in saying that," Minister Yashwant Sinha told AFP in an interview.

"If Pakistan can cooperate with the United States with regard to fighting terrorism in Afghanistan, why can't Pakistan cooperate with India in fighting terrorism in India and specially in Jammu and Kashmir," he said.

"I can't understand what is holding (us) up. We are ready to cooperate with Pakistan in this fight, even with Musharraf," Sinha said, arguing that India was the first country to "lend legitimacy to general Musharraf" following his 1999 coup.

In an audiotape broadcast Wednesday by the al-Jazeera television network, al-Qaeda's number two, Ayman al-Zawahiri, reportedly called on Islamists to rise up against "traitor Musharraf" for "selling Muslims' blood in Afghanistan" and handing over "the Arab Mujahedeen to crusader America".

"Not only this. He opened up nuclear installations to US inspection, choked off the jihad in Kashmir... and is (planning) to recognize Israel -- all for a handful of dollars the Americans stack in his pocket..." said Zawahiri.

"Act, O Muslims in Pakistan, before you wake up from your slumber to find Hindu soldiers raiding your homes in complicity with the Americans."

In the interview, Sinha deplored what he called "cross-border terrorism" in Kashmir, India's only Muslim-majority state, where

Islamic rebels have been waging a 14-year insurgency that has so far claimed 38,000 lives. Separatists put the toll at between 80,000 and 100,000.

Meanwhile, Pakistani Foreign Minister Khurshid Mahmood Kasuri Saturday called for the creation of a regional force to control Islamic militancy in disputed Kashmir state, divided between India and Pakistan. "Pakistan is ready to maintain a peacekeeping force from the SAARC region in the disputed areas of Kashmir to curb and monitor cross-border terrorism," Kasuri told an interactive programme involving Nepalese businesspeople, industrialists, journalists and intellectuals.

The South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation (SAARC) formed in 1985 groups Bangladesh, Pakistan, Nepal, Sri Lanka, the Maldives, India and Bhutan.

Kelly's death

Now heat is on BBC, Hoon

AFP, London

An inquiry into the death of weapons expert David Kelly, the source of BBC allegations that the British government "sexed up" intelligence to justify the war on Iraq, will ratchet up the pressure on both the broadcaster and Defence Secretary Geoff Hoon when it resumes this week.

The BBC's director general Greg Dyke and defence intelligence officials are among the witnesses due to appear before Judge Lord Brian Hutton when the hearing resumes Monday after a 10-day break.

Hoon, who last week resisted calls to resign after being criticised by a separate hearing into the way the government used intelligence to try to justify war on Iraq, is also expected to be recalled at some point.

Kelly, a former UN arms inspector, was found dead with a slit wrist in July after being exposed by the Ministry of Defence as the anonymous source of the BBC report in May that Downing Street "sexed up" intelligence on Iraq.



PHOTO: AFP

Palestinian schoolboys demonstrate in support of their leader Yasser Arafat (portrait) yesterday in the Rafah refugee camp in the southern Gaza Strip. Israel is likely to increase Arafat's isolation rather than expel him, a leading minister indicated.

ROK counts cost of killer typhoon

AFP, Seoul

More than 100 people were reported dead or missing yesterday as South Korea counted the cost of a typhoon that pummelled the country with the strongest winds since weather records began.

Emergency authorities said 84 people had been killed and 25 were missing after Typhoon Maemi smashed into southern provinces late Friday, triggering landslides and floods and plunging millions of people into darkness.

Some 5,000 soldiers were mobilised on Sunday to help with relief work as President Roh Moo-Hyun approved a special budget of 1.5 trillion won (1.28 billion dollars) to aid recovery efforts.

The government's Central Anti-Disaster Headquarters warned casualty figures could rise as communications were restored to areas cut off by the storm which destroyed 475 houses and left 25,000 people homeless.



PHOTO: AFP

South Koreans move around with small crafts in downtown Samchuk yesterday after Typhoon Maemi smashed into southern provinces of the country. Nearly 110 people were reported dead or missing as South Korea counted the cost of Typhoon Maemi that pummelled the country with the strongest winds since weather records began.

'Straw urged Blair not to go to war in Iraq'

AFP, London

British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw made a last-minute plea to Prime Minister Tony Blair not to go to war on Iraq, but the plea was rejected, a new book serialised in a Sunday newspaper claims.

According to the book, Straw sent a memo to the prime minister days before the conflict broke out in March, urging him to tell US President George W. Bush that Britain would offer moral and political support, but no combat troops.

But Blair rejected the advice, and demanded an assurance that Straw would support the war despite his reservations, says the book by political journalist John Kampfner, entitled "Blair's Wars", to be published on September 22.

Neither the Foreign Office nor Blair's office would make any comment on the claim, saying only: "We have nothing to say about that."

Straw is one of Blair's most loyal allies and was one of the staunchest supporters of the Iraq war in public, regularly appearing before the cameras to argue that it was the right course to take.

According to excerpts in the right-wing Mail on Sunday, Kampfner's book also alleges that Blair had secretly agreed to go to war as early as April 2002, when he had a summit with Bush at the president's ranch in Crawford, Texas.

And it claims that Blair himself had doubts about intelligence on Iraqi weapons of mass destruction which formed the basis of his justification for war, and had received evidence that Saddam Hussein's chemical and biological weapons capability was actually diminishing.

According to Kampfner, Straw confronted the prime minister on his return from an eve-of-war summit with Bush in the Azores on March 16.

US apology fails to calm angry Iraqis

AP, Fallujah

Angry mourners swarmed this central Iraqi city Saturday, firing into the air, attacking journalists and cursing the American occupation as they followed the flag-draped coffins of eight Iraqi police killed in a friendly fire incident involving US troops.

The US military apologised Saturday for the shooting that killed nine people - the eight Iraqis and a Jordanian guard - and badly damaged a hospital. US troops only opened fire after they were attacked "by unknown forces," the military said.

But the explanation did not defuse the anger washing over Fallujah, a city of 200,000 in Iraq's most troubled region. The shooting was the worst case of friendly fire since major hostilities in Iraq were declared over May 1, and it served to intensify talk here of the heavy-handedness of American troops.

"We have had enough of the Americans killing us and then just saying 'Oh, sorry!'" said Salam Mohammed, 60, a Fallujah resident and a relative of some of the victims.

"We want the Americans to leave our country because they have brought us only death," said Taleb Hameed, a 30-year-old school-teacher. "We are fed up with their apologies. We will continue our resistance."

On Saturday afternoon, the eight coffins were carried into a mosque for religious rites before they were given to family members for burial. Outside, gunshots erupted throughout Fallujah as mourners fired into the air. Some in the crowd chanted: "There is no God but Allah, and America is the enemy of Allah."

In an ominous message, Fawzi Namiq, the mosque's imam, said through loudspeakers: "Save your bullets for the chests of the enemy."

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LeT militants planned attack on Ayodhya

PTI, Jammu

After striking at Ahmedabad's Akshardham temple last year, terrorist outfit Lashker-e-Taiba (LeT) planned suicide attacks in Ayodhya and on Amarnath pilgrims, security sources claimed on Sunday.

However, the plans failed after terrorists assigned to the mission were killed in an encounter, sources added.

Citing documents and a laptop computer recovered from a top LeT commander killed in Jammu and Kashmir last month, sources said that the outfit could still be working on another plot to carry out a strike in Ayodhya, probably at or around the disputed area. "LeT had planned a strike in Ayodhya last year in the run up to the anniversary of Babri Masjid's demolition on December 6," sources said.

"However, the plan failed as two terrorists sent to carry out the strike were killed in an encounter in Tuglakhabad in South Delhi on their way to Ayodhya last November," they said.

Iran threatens to snap ties with IAEA

REUTERS, Vienna

As pressure mounted on Iran to prove it had no secret atomic weapons program by October 31, Tehran warned it might follow North Korea's lead and quit the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).

Following intense US lobbying for action against Iran, the 35-nation governing board of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) passed a resolution on Friday demanding Iran answer all outstanding questions about its nuclear program.

The resolution implies that if the IAEA still has doubts about Iran's atomic program in November, its board might declare Iran in breach of international obligations and report it to the UN Security Council for possible economic sanctions.

Approval of the resolution ignited the wrath of Tehran. Iran's ambassador to the IAEA in Vienna, Ali Akbar Salehi, said it showed Washington intended to invade Iran as it had Iraq.

In an interview in the German

weekly Der Spiegel, he expressed anger at US desires to stop Iran from enriching uranium, due to Washington's fears Tehran might be purifying it for use in a bomb.

The resolution calls on Iran to suspend all uranium enrichment activities for the time being and not to introduce uranium to its enrichment plant at Natanz.

"We could at first limit our cooperation with the IAEA to a minimum, to that which we have committed ourselves," Salehi said in the interview, which Der Spiegel said took place on Wednesday, a day after a draft of the tough resolution was tabled.

"We could also put a stop to cooperation. And as a last measure, I cannot rule out that we could withdraw from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT)."

Surprisingly, Russia -- which diplomats said had fought hard to weaken the US-backed language of the resolution to protect billions of dollars of future nuclear deals with Tehran -- threw its political weight behind the deadline and publicly

backed it.

"(The resolution) is a serious and respectful appeal by the agency for Iran to cooperate with IAEA... and do so without delay," Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Kislyak told Interfax.

If Iran were declared in non-compliance with its IAEA nuclear Safeguards Agreement -- a key part of the NPT -- and reported to the Security Council for sanctions, Tehran could lose the right to any foreign nuclear assistance.

That means Russia would lose out on a nearly \$1 billion deal to construct the Bushehr nuclear power plant in Iran.

Tehran denies US allegations that it has violated the NPT in an effort to develop atomic weapons secretly.

But Anoush Ehtesami, professor of international relations at Britain's University of Durham, said some in Iran's military wanted to quit the NPT and follow Pakistan and India's example.

'Pakistan helped al-Qaeda set up shop in Afghanistan'

AFP, Washington

Pakistan helped al-Qaeda members launch their operations in Afghanistan in the 1990s and even secretly ran a major training camp used by Osama bin Laden's terror network, according to US intelligence documents made public here.

The documents, produced by the Defense Intelligence Agency in the fall of 2001 and declassified in a censored version this past week, also indicate that legendary Afghan guerrilla commander Ahmad Shah Masood may have been killed two days before the September 11 attacks because he had learned something about bin Laden's plan and "began to warn the West."

In its secret dispatches, obtained under the Freedom of Information Act by the National Security Archive, a non-profit research organization here, the DIA warns that the documents represent only raw intelligence.

They nonetheless paint a complex picture of factional rivalry, in which Pakistan had tried to use the Taliban and al-Qaeda to promote its influence in war-torn Afghanistan -- only to eventually lose control over both of them.



PHOTO: AFP

A Seaking helicopter (top) from the Australian replenishment ship the HMAS Success passes over the Japanese Coast Guard ship the JACQ Shikishima (below), during a drill dubbed "Pacific Protector" in the Coral Sea off north-east Australia on Saturday.

Japanese envoy holds key talks with Tigers

AFP, Colombo

Japan's special peace envoy to Sri Lanka, Yasushi Akashi, yesterday flew to rebel-held territory for talks with Tamil Tigers in a bid to jump-start the island's faltering peace process, diplomats said.

Akashi was expected to discuss with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) the question of resuming Norwegian-brokered peace talks with the Colombo government and speeding up rehabilitation work, they said.

On Friday, Akashi said the international community was frustrated with the current impasse in the peace process and wanted the rebels to end their boycott of negotiations.

However, he said international aid donors were still committed to spending the promised 4.5 billion dollars to rebuild Sri Lanka despite the setbacks to the fragile peace process.

Akashi staged an aid-pledging conference in Japan in June to drum up foreign support to rebuild Sri Lanka and help boost prospects of peacefully ending the ethnic conflict which has claimed more than 60,000 lives since 1972.