

## 'US to hand over power to elected govt only'

### UN veto powers promise 'constructive' Iraq effort

AFP, New York

US Secretary of State Colin Powell told foreign leaders on Wednesday that the United States would only turn over "full authority" in Iraq to an elected Iraqi government, a senior State Department official said.

In group and individual meetings with more than 45 foreign ministers and others, Powell said Washington was eager to give Iraqis control of their country but could only cede power after the creation of a constitution and democratic elections, the official said.

"The transfer of full authority can only be completed when we have an elected government," the official said Powell had told his interlocutors.

The official, who spoke to reporters on condition of anonymity, said Powell had received solid expressions of support from most of his colleagues but would not predict when a new UN Security Council resolution on Iraq might be completed.

The official said the drafting of the resolution now depended almost entirely on the mechanism for handing over power to the Iraqis and its timing.

The creation of a UN-mandated force led by the United States is not an issue of contention, the official said.

"The issue is the mechanism and the timing of how we get to full sovereignty for the Iraqis," the official said.

Earlier, a top US official told reporters that winning passage of the resolution could be a month-long process.

That official also said that most nations — except maybe France — at the UN General Assembly sought ways to bridge gaps on when to restore self-rule to Iraq.

"With one possible exception, which, quite frankly, is the French... people have been willing to talk about and think about how the language might bridge that gap," the official said.

The State Department official echoed those remarks but said it was important to note that the UN Security Council has 15 members, not just the United States and France, and that a new resolution would definitely be passed.

"We're going to get a resolution," the official said. "We just want to get a resolution with maximum support."

Meanwhile, winning passage of a new UN resolution paving the way for more international troops and money for Iraq could be a month-long process, a top US official said Wednesday.

"Nobody's in a particular hurry to get this done, because we're going to do it right," the official, who requested anonymity, told reporters in a briefing on US President George W. Bush's two-day visit here.

Asked whether the process of crafting consensus language could be a "months-long process" the US official replied: "It could be. And I don't think that there is any concern that that would be a problem."

US officials contacted reporters later Wednesday, however, and said the US official had misheard the question. They said the official was referring to a month-long process and not one of several months.

The official also said that most nations — except maybe France — here at the UN General Assembly sought ways to bridge gaps on the most contentious issue: how fast to turn Iraq over to self-government.

"With one possible exception, which, quite frankly, is the French... people have been willing to talk

about and think about how the language might bridge that gap," the official said.

The official also took shots at France's call for a speedy transfer of sovereignty, saying rushing the process "is simply going to be harmful and the United States is not prepared to do that."

Meanwhile, the leading opponents of the war in Iraq, France, Germany and Russia, promised a "constructive" approach to US efforts to enlist international help to rebuild the shattered nation.

The breakthrough Wednesday at the United Nations General Assembly came as French President Jacques Chirac said France, Germany and Russia agreed to take a "constructive" approach to Washington's request for help.

Leaders of the three countries spearheaded opposition to the war on Iraq, which US President George W. Bush had defended before a sceptical audience of world leaders at the United Nations on Tuesday.

Chirac acknowledged common ground on how to approach the question of a US resolution that seeks a UN mandate for multinational troops in Iraq.



Tunisians help each other to cross a flooded road in Ariana Wednesday after heavy rains in the Tunisia area.

PHOTO: AFP



## Amina spared from stoning death

REUTERS, Katsina

A Nigerian court yesterday spared a woman from being stoned to death by overturning an Islamic court's conviction for adultery.

"It is the view of this court that the judgment of the Upper Sharia Court, Funtua, was very wrong and the appeal of Amina Lawal is hereby discharged and acquitted," judge Ibrahim Maiangwa said, reading the judgment of the appeals court.

Western governments led by the European Union had urged Nigerian authorities to intervene since the illiterate 31-year-old was convicted of adultery in March 2002 for having a baby 10 months after a divorce.

Campaign groups outraged by the Islamic sentence had vowed to mount protests if the Sharia Appeals Court in the conservative state of Katsina upheld the judgment.

PHOTO: AFP

Thirty-one-year-old Nigerian single mother Amina Lawal holds her 20-month-old daughter Wasila at her home in Kurami, northern Nigeria on September 17. The Katsina State Sharia Court of Appeal spared Amina of the stoning death sentence which a Funtua lower Sharia court decreed when she was convicted last year of adultery under northern Niger's strict new Islamic code or Sharia.

## Death toll in Indonesian boat tragedy rises to 19

AP, Jakarta

Rescuers yesterday found three corpses close to where a passenger boat sank this week off Indonesia's Sumatra island, bringing to 19 the number killed in the accident, officials said.

The boat went down close to Topang, a small island off the north-eastern coast of Sumatra, late on Monday amid strong winds and big waves, rescue official Jafri said.

Thirty-eight people were rescued by passing fishing ships, Jafri said. Rescuers picked up three bodies on Thursday morning, he said. Search for one missing passenger was continuing.

The boat was on a routine trip from Pelalawan regency to Topang, about 1,000 km Northwest of Jakarta.

## More US reservists may go to Iraq

AP, Washington

The Pentagon is so squeezed for troops to send to Iraq that it may have to alert thousands more National Guard and Reserve members within several weeks for possible call-up.

That depends mainly on whether President Bush succeeds in the next few weeks in persuading Turkey, India, Pakistan or South Korea to form another multinational division for Iraq duty. Without that division, some mix of additional US active-duty and reserve troops may be needed.

Marine Corps Gen. Peter Pace, vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said the administration still hopes for major contributions from other nations, but military planners are not counting on it.

"Hope is not a plan," Pace told

reporters Wednesday.

Loren Thompson, a defence analyst at the private Lexington Institute, said Defence Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld may have another plan in the event he does not get the foreign troops he was hoping for: Bring home some US troops rather than replace them with reservists.

Thompson says the Pentagon is wary of adding to the burden on reservists, many greatly inconvenienced by call-ups that uproot them from families and civilian jobs. Over time, this stress could make it harder for the military to retain reservists.

"Normal people will have to diminish their civilian careers in order to serve in the reserves, and that's a bargain almost nobody would be willing to accept," Thompson said.

## Family of Kelly slams UK govt

REUTERS, London

The family of weapons expert David Kelly accused the British government yesterday of cynically using him as a pawn in an all-out battle with the BBC over the Iraq war that drove the scientist to commit suicide.

The condemnation came as the inquiry into the death of government scientist Kelly — who killed himself after being exposed as the source of the disputed BBC report on Iraq — entered its final stages.

"The family invite the inquiry to find that the government made a deliberate decision to use Dr Kelly as part of its strategy in its battle with the BBC," Jeremy Gompertz, counsel for Kelly's family, said in his closing statements.

Publicly naming Kelly to undermine the BBC's report "was a cynical abuse of power which deserves the strongest possible condemnation," Gompertz added.

## One killed in Minnesota school shooting

REUTERS, Minneapolis

A Minnesota high school freshman opened fire in the gymnasium on Wednesday, killing one classmate and critically wounding another before a teacher persuaded him to give up his gun, police said.

The attacker was taken into custody after the teacher talked the unidentified shooter into surrendering the weapon, Phil Jones, the police chief in Cold Spring, told reporters.

Firing a small-caliber handgun, the unidentified student at Rocori High School shot one boy in the gym and the other in a room used for weight-lifting, authorities said.

One victim was shot in the torso, the other in the head or neck, Jones said.

Authorities did not speculate about a motive for the late-morning shootings, though a fellow student described the attacker as a loner.

## India, China, Russia push for sovereignty of Iraqi people

IANS, New York

In a significant development India, Russia and China on Wednesday decided to adopt a common approach on Iraq and called for a political process to ensure quick return of sovereignty to the Iraqi people.

After a joint meeting of the foreign ministers of the three countries, Yashwant Sinha said there was "unanimity that what was required in Iraq was not sending more troops but a political solution that will see the return of sovereignty to the Iraqi people, a return of governance".

The meeting of the ministers — an initiative that was launched on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly last year — discussed a range of issues, but Iraq was a dominant theme.

This year's meeting was hosted by External Affairs Minister Yashwant Sinha and was attended

by his Chinese and Russian counterparts, Li Zhaoxing and Igor Ivanov.

Analysts say that the grouping seeks to counter-balance the growing US influence in Central Asia and West Asia.

Sinha said that India would be working with the China and Russia on a new resolution on Iraq that is to be placed before the Security Council.

The three ministers also discussed the need to reform the UN, according to Sinha.

"We have adopted a common approach and we have asked our ambassadors at the UN to work together on this and, if necessary, take the help of experts to firm up a proposal."

The three ministers are now scheduled to meet in Moscow, but the dates of the meeting have not been firmed up.

## Hunt to catch Saddam's number 2 hots up

AFP, Mosul

Kurds and US forces are stepping up the hunt for Saddam Hussein's number two, Ezzat Ibrahim, who they say is sick and in hiding in the Mosul region of northern Iraq.

"Ezzat Ibrahim is in the Mosul area, he is sick, we are hunting him," said a senior official of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), who captured Taha Yassin Ramadan, vice president of the ousted regime.

"We have received information that he is around Mosul," said commander Bruska Shaways, deputy to Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) leader Massoud Barzani, and who played the intermediary in negotiations for the surrender of ex-defence minister Sultan Hashem Ahmad in Mosul last week.

In recent days, the US 101st Airborne Division has carried out several operations to try to snare Ibrahim, Kurdish sources said.

## 'Premature' to describe Iraq arms report: US

### Inspectors fail to find any WMD in Iraq: BBC

AFP, London

A senior US official warned it was too soon to say what US and British arms inspectors scouring Iraq for evidence of weapons of mass destruction will say in a forthcoming report, as the BBC said inspectors will report finding no such weapons.

"I think that it is premature for anybody to start saying what is or is not in that report," the official, a top aide to US President George W. Bush, said in a briefing to reporters on condition of anonymity.

Former weapons inspector David Kay, who leads the 1,400-strong Iraq Survey Group, "is still in the process, with some people in the intelligence community, of developing that report," the official said.

"My understanding is that it is a report that is very much a progress report and that doesn't rule anything out or anything in," the official added. "I would not jump to any definitive conclusions about what's in that report, and I think anybody who's doing that probably doesn't really know" what's in it.

The BBC said Wednesday, quoting an unnamed US government source, that the Iraq Survey Group, a 1,400-strong Anglo-American team, will report that not even "minute" amounts of nuclear, chemical or biological weapons material have been unearthed.

In the US, the Central Intelligence Agency said an interim report by former weapons inspector David Kay was not expected to reach any firm

conclusions or rule anything in or out.

Iraq's refusal to give up its alleged weapons of mass destruction was cited by London and Washington as a main reason for going to war on Saddam Hussein's Iraq in March.

No delivery systems for weapons of mass destruction and no laboratories involved in developing such weapons were found, according to the BBC television show "Daily Politics," which quoted a source within the administration of US President George W. Bush. The BBC reported that Kay's team of scientists, military and intelligence experts did come across some depleted uranium samples in a cave north of Baghdad but reckoned they could have been there since the 1991 Gulf war.

## Blair popularity plummets as Kelly inquiry ends

AFP, London

The inquiry into the suicide of government scientist David Kelly, at the centre of claims that Britain embellished its case for war on Iraq, wraps up amid a slump in the popularity of Prime Minister Tony Blair, suffering the worst crisis of his six-year tenure.

After 22 days of at times sensational testimony from 74 witnesses including Blair, Defence Secretary Geoff Hoon, leading security officials and BBC journalists, the inquiry wraps up with closing statements from lawyers representing the main parties.

Senior judge Brian Hutton has said he will not publish his findings

until November at the earliest. The final day of proceedings will be broadcast live from London's Royal Courts of Justice for the first time since the inquiry began last month.

Unprecedented in terms of its scope, the inquiry has exposed the inner workings of Blair's government and that of the secret services.

Thousands of emails and documents that would otherwise have been left under lock and key for decades have been made public by Hutton in order to find the reasons why Kelly, a respected former UN weapons expert, felt the need to take his own life and leave behind a wife and family.

Kelly, 59, was found dead with a

slashed wrist in woodland near his countryside home on July 18, days after being "outed" by the Ministry of Defence as the source of a BBC report that the government "sexed up" a dossier on Iraq ahead of the US-led war.

Kelly's death and increasing concern over Blair's decision to contribute over 40,000 British troops to the US-led invasion of Iraq in March have left the prime minister facing the worst crisis of his tenure.

In a further blow to Blair, a poll Thursday showed his approval rating has plummeted following Kelly's suicide with 61 percent of voters now unhappy with his performance.

## Our Milky Way galaxy gobbling up Sagittarius

REUTERS, Washington

Our Milky Way galaxy is gobbling up its galactic neighbour, Sagittarius, and on Wednesday, scientists offered documentary proof of this continuing cosmic cannibalism.

Astronomers have mapped the Sagittarius galaxy to show in detail how its debris wrap around and pass through the Milky Way, which contains Earth.

On its way to oblivion, the dwarf Sagittarius — which is about 10,000 times the mass of the Milky Way — is getting stretched, torn apart and ultimately eaten, scientists at the University of Virginia and the University of Massachusetts reported.

"It's clear who's the bully in the

interaction," Steven Majewski of the University of Virginia, lead author of the report, said in a statement.

The study will be published in the Dec. 20 issue of the Astrophysical Journal.

The act of cannibalism had been obscured by stars and cosmic dust, but was revealed when astronomers looked for infrared radiation coming from stars known as M giants, which are common in Sagittarius but rare in the outer reaches of the Milky Way.

By focusing on these stars, the scientists said they were able to capture the totality of the Milky Way's meal, in a vision that makes it appear that our galaxy is slurping the stars of Sagittarius as if they were a stellar strand of spaghetti.



PHOTO: REUTERS

Our Milky Way galaxy (centre) is gobbling up its galactic neighbour, Sagittarius, (white trail from left to right) and scientists offered documentary proof of this continuing cosmic cannibalism on Wednesday. On its way to oblivion, the dwarf Sagittarius — which is about 10,000 times the mass of the Milky Way — is getting stretched, torn apart and ultimately eaten, scientists at the University of Virginia and the University of Massachusetts reported.

## Prodi faces grilling on corruption allegation

AFP, Strasbourg

European Commission chief Romano Prodi faces the grilling of his life from lawmakers after official findings painted a damning picture of fictitious contracts and missing money at a pivotal EU agency.

A trio of reports released late Wednesday accused the European Union's executive body of being asleep at the wheel as top executives at Eurostat, the EU's data-compiling arm, diverted millions of euros into secret bank accounts.

Prodi was to face angry calls to sacrifice at least one of his commissioners, having come to office in 1999 promising "zero tolerance" of corruption after the spectacular implosion of the previous Commission.