



Workers of the former government of ousted Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein protest outside the main presidential palace yesterday in Baghdad, demanding jobs and pay.

Inquiry call over US agent leak

White House rejects independent counsel for information leak on Iraq

BBC ONLINE, REUTERS, Washington

Prominent members of the opposition Democratic Party in the United States are calling for an independent investigation into new allegations surrounding the case for war in Iraq.

Two White House officials are said to have illegally disclosed to journalists that Valerie Plame, the wife of former diplomat Joseph Wilson, was an agent for the Central Intelligence Agency.

It is alleged that this was an act of revenge because Mr Wilson had accused the Bush administration of exaggerating the case for war against Saddam Hussein.

Democratic presidential hopefuls Howard Dean and Wesley Clark said a special investigator should be appointed.

Although the Department of

Justice is looking into the matter, some have expressed concerns that it could come under political pressure.

Mr Clark said an independent commission was needed.

"This administration has played politics with national security for a long time, but this is going too far," he told Reuters news agency.

Mr Dean called for a thorough investigation free from political pressure, suggesting it be carried out by the independent Department of Justice inspector general.

The White House has said it will co-operate with the Department of Justice by handing over telephone records and other information on request.

It has denied allegations linking Mr Bush's senior political adviser, Karl Rove, to the claim.

Before the war in Iraq, Mr Wilson was sent by the CIA to the West

African state of Niger in order to investigate claims that Iraq had tried to buy nuclear material there.

His report concluded that there was no evidence for the claims.

Despite this, Mr Bush referred to them in his State of the Union address in January.

In a subsequent article in the New York Times, Mr Wilson questioned why his report had been ignored, forcing the White House to admit it had been a mistake to include the claim in the address.

The fact that Mr Wilson's wife worked for the CIA was published by a columnist, Robert Novak, shortly after Mr Wilson's article appeared. He has refused to divulge his source.

"I don't think people appreciate very much ... the unnecessary dragging of my wife's name into this sphere," Wilson told CNN.

The Washington Post has

reported an allegation that White House officials blew the cover of Mr Wilson's wife in order to discredit him by suggesting he had been given the Niger mission only at his wife's urging. A leak of classified information is a federal crime punishable by up to 10 years in prison.

The White House on Monday rejected Democratic demands that an independent counsel be appointed to find out who leaked secret information apparently aimed at discrediting a vocal critic of pre-war intelligence on Iraq.

The sudden squall over the leak that blew the cover of an undercover CIA operative energised Democratic presidential candidates and deepened tension over the administration's failure to find promised weapons of mass destruction in Iraq.

Officials said the Justice Department began a preliminary

inquiry to determine if there should be a full-blown probe based on a memo from the CIA stating that a leak had occurred.

An official said one thrust of the inquiry would be to determine whether the leak violated the law or national security, or caused any damage.

White House spokesman Scott McClellan, during a lively news briefing, said no internal investigation was planned.

"At this point, I think the Department of Justice would be the appropriate one to look into a matter like this ... There are a lot of career professionals at the Department of Justice that address matters like this."

Retired Gen. Wesley Clark, a Democratic presidential hopeful, said an independent commission was needed.

'Iraq constitution group may miss deadline'

REUTERS, Washington

An Iraqi group working on a new constitution said it would be impossible to complete the job within the US goal of six months because of deep disagreements over major issues, The Washington Post reported on Tuesday.

Members are split over the role of Islamic law, the form of a new political system and even how to select delegates to a constitutional convention, the newspaper reported, citing members of the US-selected Governing Council and others familiar with the process.

The newspaper said that Iraq's constitution panel was scheduled to present a report to the Governing Council on Tuesday.

Secretary of State Colin Powell said on Friday that he would like Iraqi leaders to produce a new constitution within a six-month period.

"Once they start their work, six

months is an appropriate time," Powell said at a news conference at UN headquarters. He added that his proposal did not envision a precise deadline.

"It's impossible to do it in six months as Mr. Powell wants," council member Dara Noureddine was quoted as saying. "It's unreasonable. It takes more time than this -- much more."

The Bush administration regards a new constitution and subsequent elections as essential prerequisites to the end of the occupation and the exit of American troops, The Post said.

According to the newspaper, Iraqi leaders insisted that the entire process of drafting a new constitution can not be accomplished in less than a year.

"This is our future," Noureddine said. "This is for the next generation, not just for the next few years. One should not be hasty in formulating the constitution."

N Korea not interested in further nuke talks

AFP, Seoul

North Korea said Tuesday it had no interest in a new round of six-party talks and was taking "practical measures" to beef up its nuclear deterrent as current US policy was leading to war.

A foreign ministry spokesman, in a statement carried by Pyongyang's official Korean Central News Agency (KCNA), accused Washington of using the first round of six-party talks held in Beijing last month to try to disarm North Korea.

"This compels the DPRK (North Korea) to discard any interest or expectations for the talks," the spokesman said.

"As already clarified, the DPRK has not made any promise regarding the next round of six-way talks," he said.

The spokesman criticised the United States for demanding North Korea move first to scrap its nuclear

program while rejecting the North's "bold proposal" for the denuclearisation of the Korean peninsula.

"The US demand that the DPRK dismantle its nuclear deterrent force first under this situation will only lead to a war. This is clearly evidenced by the Iraqi situation," he warned.

North Korea is taking "practical measures to steadily beef up its nuclear deterrent force as a just self-defensive means" to counter a US pre-emptive attack against the reclusive country, he said.

The statement came as top Japanese, US and South Korean officials met in Tokyo for a second day of informal talks to refine policy ahead of a possible new round of six-way talks.

The meeting brought together Washington's point man in dealings with North Korea, James Kelly, Mitoji Yabunaka, head of the Japanese foreign ministry's Asian and Oceanian affairs bureau, and

South Korean Deputy Foreign Minister Lee Soo-Hyuck.

A Japanese diplomat said the three admitted growing confusion over the North's intentions.

"The situation regarding North Korea is so uncertain. We have been receiving various messages. Very generally speaking, we just don't know what to make of them," the official said.

North Korea blamed US hostility for the lack of concrete progress during the first round of talks -- also involving China and Russia -- which took place on August 27-29 in Beijing.

The talks ended without a tangible agreement, with the delegates agreeing to meet again but failing to fix a date.



Spanish cosmonaut Pedro Duque (L), US astronaut Mike Foale (R) and Russian cosmonaut Alexandr Kaleri (C) pose for a picture before their training session in Star City, Cosmonauts' Training Center, near Moscow yesterday. International space crew will take a flight to International Space Station (ISS) 18 October from Baikonur cosmodrome.

Bollywood producer found guilty of underworld nexus

AFP, Mumbai

Leading Bollywood film producer and financier Bharat Shah was found guilty Tuesday of failing to inform police that the criminal underworld had muscled in on a movie he made three years ago.

However, he was spared conviction under a harsher law which carries the death penalty for those convicted of abetting organised crime.

Police had claimed the 2000 movie "Chori Chori, Chupke Chupke" (Stealing Quietly) had been financed by Shah and produced by Nasim Rizvi at the behest of Dubai-based underworld don Chhota Shakeel.

The court has found Rizvi and another accused Abdul Rahim Allabux Khan guilty and convicted them under the Maharashtra Control of Organised Crime Act (MCOCA), which has a capital punishment option.

All three are expected to be sentenced on Wednesday, with Shah facing a sentence of up to seven years in jail and the other two life imprisonment, lawyers said.

Judge A.P. Bhangale convicted Shah under the Indian penal code instead of the more stringent MCOCA.

"He has been found guilty under Section 118, 383 and 387 of the Indian Penal Code for being aware

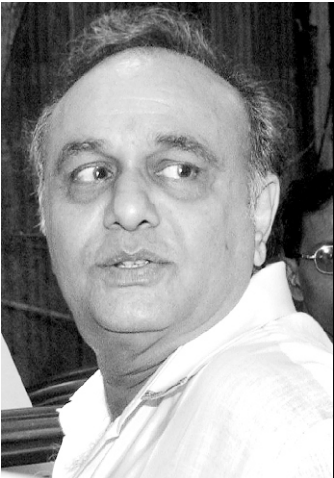


PHOTO: AFP
Bollywood film producer Bharat Shah leaves court in Bombay yesterday.

of organised crime syndicates working during the financing of film "Chori Chori, Chupke Chupke" and not settling the law in motion by informing the ... police of this activity," said Bhangale.

He said that Shah, by concealing the information, facilitated criminal activities such as extortion threats to film personalities during and even after the making of the movie.

The judge found that Rizvi and Khan had worked hand-in-glove and were involved in criminal conspiracy with Shakeel to threaten and extort money from film personalities.

During the trial, police played tapes in court showing recorded conversations between Shah and Shakeel.

However, the court rejected the tapes saying the conversation between Shah and Shakeel was "doubtful".

Shah, the producer of Bollywood's costliest movie "Devdas" (Pining Lover), was first arrested in 2001 and charged with forging links with the underworld and using slush funds to make movies.

US prepares new UN resolution on Iraq

REUTERS, Washington/Jazeera, Iraq

The United States said it would lay out steps in a new draft UN resolution to put Iraqis back in control of their country as the human cost of occupying Iraq mounted.

The UN resolution, which US Secretary of State Colin Powell predicted would be ready within days, was aimed at answering European complaints that a previous draft was too vague on how Iraqis could replace US occupation authorities.

A US soldier was killed in Iraq on Monday, the 81st to die in action since the start of May, as American forces backed by helicopters fought guerrillas for hours in a restive area west of Baghdad.

US State Department spokesman Richard Boucher said Washington wanted the UN Security Council to pass the proposed resolution before a conference of aid donors for Iraq, scheduled to open in Madrid on October 23.

"The goal is to respond in some ways to the desire of other governments to have a sense of...movement and momentum toward that political horizon, so we

will be making appropriate modifications," Boucher told a daily briefing.

In Brussels, European Union foreign ministers called for the restoration of Iraqi sovereignty but set no timetable, unlike EU members France and Germany who have demanded such a move within months.

In a bid to help the Iraqi economy, legal authorities in Baghdad said the trial of accused oil smugglers from a Panamanian-flagged tanker with a Ukrainian crew was intended to send a clear message to traffickers draining Iraq of precious fuel.

US-led authorities said Iraq's current oil exports were around 1.2 million barrels per day (bpd) from production of nearly two million bpd -- well below peak exports of 2.8 million bpd before the war in March that toppled Saddam Hussein.

But the country's oil export potential is being closely watched on global markets, with oil cartel OPEC saying it was cutting production to accommodate a slow but steady rise in Iraq's exports and in the meantime pushing up oil prices.

UN envoy in Myanmar to revive talks

AFP, Yangon

United Nations envoy Razali Ismail on Tuesday began a critical three-day mission to Myanmar aimed at bringing opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi and the ruling generals back to the negotiating table.

But sources said that on the opening day of the visit Razali did not secure meetings with the democracy icon or top members of the regime who put her under house arrest last week after holding her in custody for nearly four months.

Aung San Suu Kyi, 58, was taken to her famous lakeside residence after undergoing major gynaecological surgery on September 19.

Razali is expected to see her as well as Myanmar's leader Senior General Than Shwe and Prime Minister General Khin Nyunt on Wednesday.

"I will be making my program now," he told reporters as he began his 11th visit on a low-key note with talks with Home Minister Tin Hlaing and a dinner hosted by Deputy Foreign Minister Khin Maung Win.

Razali acted as the catalyst for landmark national reconciliation talks between Aung San Suu Kyi and the junta which began in October 2000 but collapsed earlier this year.

He now faces the difficult task of reviving the contacts and advancing a seven-point "roadmap" for democratic reform unveiled by the military regime in August, as well as pushing for Aung San Suu Kyi's release.

Ethnic political parties, who form an important third sphere of influence in Myanmar after the ruling junta and Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD), said they are met with

Razali on Wednesday.

"I am very optimistic that Razali will be able to achieve something significant this time around, including the release of Aung San Suu Kyi," said Khun Tun Oo, chairman of the Shan National League for Democracy.

He said that if the junta was sincere about the roadmap, he would ask Razali to insist that the first step in the process -- a national convention to draft a new constitution -- was totally revamped.

"It should be an entirely new national convention with the ethnic minorities genuinely represented," he told AFP.

The NLD quit an earlier national convention in 1995, saying it was illegitimate and unrepresentative because participants were hand-picked by the government.

Armitage, Rocca on mission to Pakistan

PTI, Islamabad

Indo-Pak peace process will figure in the wide-ranging talks US Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage and Assistant Secretary of State for South Asia Christina Rocca hold with Pakistani leadership during their three-day visit to Pakistan beginning October 2.

Armitage and Rocca are arriving here on Thursday to meet President Pervez Musharraf and other top leaders, Pakistan Foreign Office spokesman Masood Khan told reporters on Tuesday.

The ongoing war on terrorism, deteriorating Pak-Afghan relations over the issue of resurgence of Taliban, the progress on US request to send troops to Iraq would also come up for discussion.

Armitage and Rocca's visit to Islamabad may focus on relations between India and Pakistan. After the highs of stabilising road links and exchange of Parliamentary delegations, which attracted large public participation on both sides, the ties showed signs of deterioration specially after strong speeches

delivered by Musharraf and Vajpayee at last week's UN General Assembly.

The US officials arrive virtually days after Musharraf's meeting with US President George W Bush and US Secretary Colin Powell last week on the sidelines of UN General Assembly in New York.

Armitage and Rocca would hold talks with Musharraf to review actions taken on decisions arrived at during Pakistan President's meetings with Bush and Powell, diplomatic sources said here. Their visit coincides with the 10-day tour of Pakistan Premier Mir Zafarullah Khan Jamali to Washington, which began on Tuesday.

With escalation of violence in Kashmir, Armitage was again expected to press Pakistan to crackdown on the militant groups. This time the steps being taken by Pakistan to crackdown on Taliban too were expected to come under close scrutiny as both US and Afghanistan expressed concern over resurgence of Taliban in the recent months using Pakistan territory.

US pulls out of Liberia

Hundreds flee from central Liberia: UNHCR

AFP, BBC ONLINE, Geneva/Monrovia

The United States has begun withdrawing its peacekeeping troops from Liberia, ahead of the arrival of a United Nations force.

Two warships have already left Liberia waters, and a third is due to leave mid-week, defence officials said.

The UN is due to start deploying its largest force in the world - some 15,000 troops - on Wednesday.

About 100 US soldiers remain on the ground in Liberia, mainly stationed around the US embassy.

The US forces were sent to Liberia in August to support Nigerian-led peacekeepers who helped restore calm to the capital, Monrovia, after months of fighting between government troops and rebels.

However, the peacekeepers have not deployed to the rest of the country, where tension between the rival forces remains high.

Stretched by military commit-

ments in Iraq and Afghanistan, President George W Bush said the American troops would be withdrawn by 1 October.

The US warships carried more than 4,000 sailors and Marines, but most of them never set foot on the mainland.

Two of the ships - the USS Carter Hall and the USS Nashville - left Liberian waters over the weekend.

The third vessel - the USS Iwo Jima - is expected to follow in the next few days.

"Since our mission was to facilitate Ecomil [West African peacekeeping forces] efforts to stabilise Monrovia and create conditions for humanitarian relief efforts to resume, that mission has been largely accomplished," said Pentagon spokesman Lieutenant Dan Hettlage.

The 3,500-strong Ecomil force will swap their green helmets for the blue of the UN peace force, Unmil, on Wednesday.

More than a thousand Liberians have fled to neighbouring Guinea amid threats of attacks by rebels in

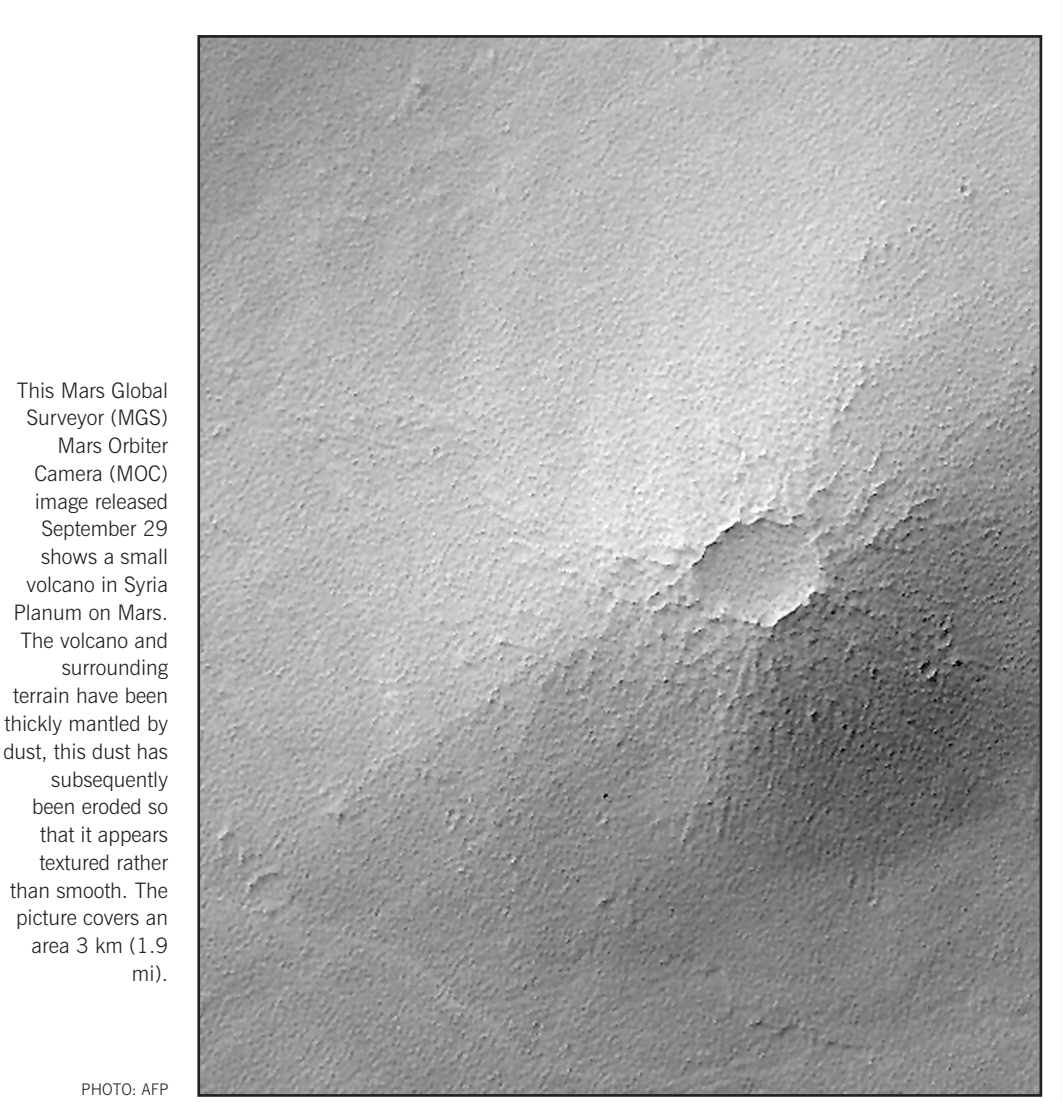
central Liberia and reports of summary executions and rape of civilians, the United Nations refugee agency said Tuesday.

A spokesman for the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Peter Kessler, said some 1300 Liberian refugees had been registered so far this week in the Guinean border areas of Bignamou and Baala.

"They said they had left their homes in Lofa county following threats of rebel attacks," Kessler told journalists.

"Some of these departures have been fed by reports that rebels have been harassing civilians, looting and raping women. There have also been unconfirmed reports of summary executions," Kessler said.

Fighting between rebels of the Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) and government forces in nearby Bong and Nimba countries forced more than 6,000 Liberians to flee to Guinea



This Mars Global Surveyor (MGS) Mars Orbiter Camera (MOC) image released September 29 shows a small volcano in Syria Planum on Mars. The volcano and surrounding terrain have been thickly mantled by dust, this dust has subsequently been eroded so that it appears textured rather than smooth. The picture covers an area 3 km (1.9 mi).

PHOTO: AFP