

## Top scientist of Saddam flees to Iran

AP, Baghdad

The Iraqi scientist who headed Saddam Hussein's long-range missile programme has fled to neighboring Iran, a country identified as a state sponsor of terrorism with a successful missile program and nuclear ambitions, US officers involved in the weapons hunt told The Associated Press.

Dr. Modher Sadeq-Saba al-Tamimi's departure comes as top weapons makers from Saddam's deposed regime find themselves eight months out of work but with skills that could be lucrative to militaries or terrorist organisations in neighbouring countries. US officials have said some are already in Syria and Jordan.

Experts long feared the collapse of Saddam's rule could lead to the kind of scientific brain-drain the United States tried to prevent as the former Soviet Union collapsed.



PHOTO: AFP  
The commander of US Army's 1-22, 4th ID Lieutenant Colonel Steven Russell (R) stands on his humvee with other members of his unit as they watch Abrams tanks and a mortar platoon fire at an enemy target in Tikrit early yesterday. The mortar platoon targeted several positions outside this northern Iraqi town from where attacks by insurgents have taken place in the last few days against coalition forces stationed in the area.

## US adopts 'aggressive' approach in Iraq

BBC ONLINE

United States troops have been shelling targets near Saddam Hussein's home town of Tikrit as they step up the pressure against insurgents in Iraq.

American soldiers backed by armoured vehicles and helicopters also raided a Baghdad neighbourhood overnight.

US commanders are adopting what they call a "more aggressive" approach in response to mounting losses.

President George W Bush has admitted last week was tough but said: "We're going to deal with the terrorists."

His forces were changing their tactics to match those of their enemies, he said.

Early on Monday, witnesses near Tikrit reported the ground shaking as flares lit up the night sky.

US troops shelled positions from where they believe insurgents had fired mortars or rockets on their base in Tikrit.

"For us, this is not a display. We want to get the enemy...The message is 'Give up, it's over,'" Lieutenant-Colonel Steve Russell said.

The bombardment was part of Operation Ivy Cyclone Two which is targeting insurgents in north-central Iraq.

It comes after 17 coalition troops died when two Black Hawk helicopters collided and crashed in the northern city of Mosul on Saturday - one was reportedly hit by ground fire.

US forces fired a satellite-guided missile at a "guerrilla camp" about 25km (15 miles) west of Kirkuk on Sunday, for the first time since major combat ended.

Pressure is also being stepped up in

the Iraqi capital where American forces moved into the upper-class Sunni Muslim neighbourhood of Azamiyah, searching 450 houses over seven hours in the hunt for weapons and fighters.

The raids angered many residents.

"Of course everybody has weapons.

We have all been robbed. We were afraid of the Iraqis and now we're afraid of the Americans," said Samir al-Hadith, an engineer from Saudi Arabia living in the neighbourhood.

US forces are clearly on the offensive in Iraq in the face of mounting casualties among coalition troops and the loss of five helicopters in just over three weeks, the BBC's Peter Biles in Baghdad says.

The operation in Tikrit took place hours after an Arabic TV station broadcast an audio tape purported to be of the ousted Iraqi dictator.

## US forces nab resistance leader, 19 others in Iraq

AFP, Baghdad

An Iraqi resistance leader and two fighters blamed for anti-US attacks have been captured along with 17 other men, coalition forces said yesterday.

A Central Command (Centcom) statement named the guerrilla chief caught last Friday in Habbaniyah, near Ramadi and west of the capital, as "Kathim Mohammad Faris also known as Abu Kaaf... a former Iraqi special forces officer and a fedayeen leader."

It said he was responsible for attacks with explosives and "ambushes" of the US-led coalition forces.

The statement added that Faris was "closely linked" to Khamis Sirhan, the number 54 on the US army wanted list of 55 former top Iraqi officials.

## Sharon urges Berlusconi to defend Israel at EU

REUTERS, Jerusalem

Prime Minister Ariel Sharon flew to Rome yesterday to enlist Italy's help in fending off European Union criticism of Israeli policy toward Palestinians and help stem what he calls a rise in anti-Semitism in Europe.

Sharon will urge Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi, whose country holds the rotating EU presidency, to water down a pending EU condemnation of Israel's West Bank security barrier and its snubbing of EU Middle East envoy Marc Otte.

Sharon, traveling to Italy two days after at least 23 people were killed in twin bomb attacks on synagogues in Istanbul, will also be lobbying for Italian support against a perceived upsurge of anti-Semitism.

## Turkey suicide bomber caught on camera

### Ankara probes al-Qaeda bombing claim

AFP, Ankara

Turkey said yesterday it had caught on camera one of the suicide bombers in weekend attacks on Istanbul synagogues as the government looked into reported claims that the al-Qaeda terror network was to blame.

London-based Arab newspaper Al-Quds Al-Arabi said Sunday it received a claim of responsibility from al-Qaeda for the explosions which ripped through two synagogues in the heart of historic Istanbul during Sabbath prayers on Saturday, killing 23 people and injuring 300 more.

Turkish Interior Minister Abdulkadir Aksu said the attacks were the work of two suicide bombers who detonated explosive-laden trucks outside the Neve Shalom and Beth Israel synagogues, and

vowed to catch all the culprits.

"We have footage from the security cameras of Neve Shalom. The truck exploded as it was driving past," Aksu told the Vatan newspaper, adding that one of the bombers was captured on film.

"He is in the footage, although it is not clear. We are trying to establish their identities... It is also not clear whether they were Turkish citizens or foreigners," he added.

Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who was hosting a meeting of his cabinet on Monday, said Turkey was trying to confirm the al-Qaeda claim, while officials said several people had been detained in connection with the attacks.

Turkish officials have already said they believe a major foreign organiza-

tion was responsible and have largely discounted an initial claim by a local underground fundamentalist group.

The Arabic-language statement from a branch of al-Qaeda also warned of attacks by "cars of death" in the United States and its key allies including Britain, Australia and Japan.

"Abu Hafzal-Masri Brigades struck a mortal blow after having kept Jewish intelligence agents under surveillance and determined that five of them were in two synagogues in the centre of Istanbul," it said.

In Brussels, the European Union condemned the bombings as "heinous terrorist attacks" and stressed that "terrorism and anti-Semitism must be fought by the whole international community".

## Burundi peace deal signed as rebels given ultimatum

AFP, Dar es Salaam

Burundi President Domitien Ndayizeye and the leader of the main Hutu rebel movement, Pierre Nkurunziza, on Sunday signed a peace accord to end 10 years of civil war in the central African country.

African leaders, after witnessing the signing in the Tanzanian city of Dar es Salaam, issued an ultimatum to the smaller National Liberation Forces (FNL) rebel group, giving it three months to open negotiations to reach a comprehensive peace accord for Burundi or face consequences.

Women and children danced and sang as Ndayizeye and Nkurunziza, the head of the Forces for the Defense of Democracy (FDD), signed the power-sharing accord.

"This accord will hold, the war in Burundi will end, the process is under way. Burundians know where they are going and have decided to go forward," Ndayizeye said afterward.



PHOTO: AFP  
Indian activists of the Delhi Pradesh Congress Committee (DPCC) brandish placards as they shout slogans against the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government in New Delhi yesterday. The activists were protesting at the allegations printed in a weekend newspaper that Junior Minister for Environment and Forest Dilip Singh Judeo has accepted bribes. Judeo has resigned from the government led by Atal Behari Vajpayee.

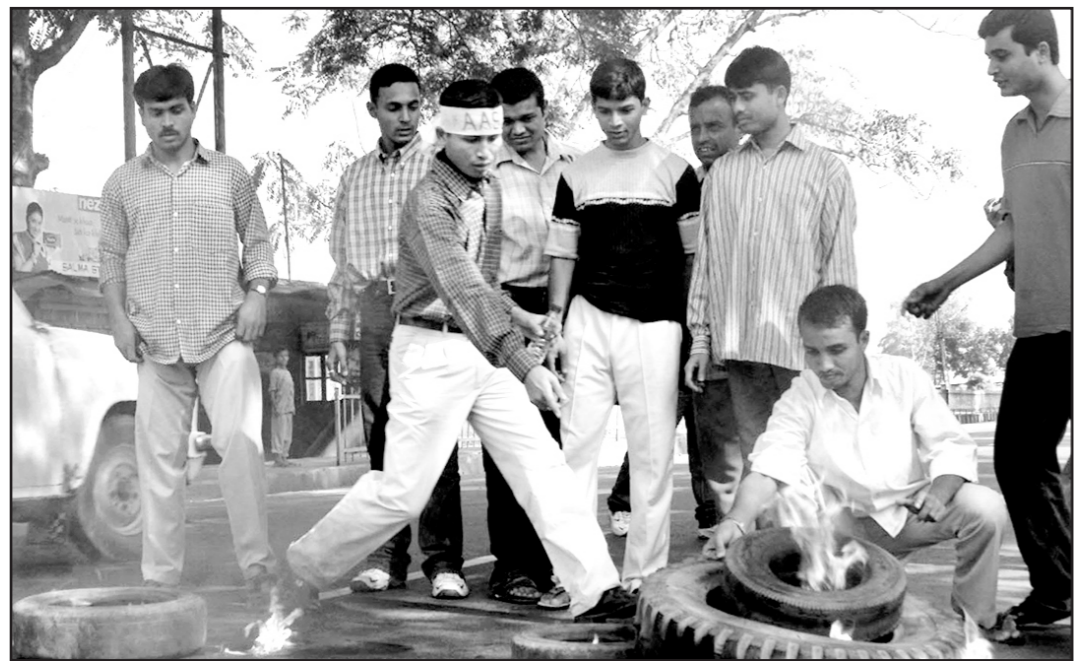


PHOTO: AFP  
A group of Indian students from the All Assam Students' Union (AASU) set light to a barricade of tyres blocking a road in Guwahati yesterday. India's isolated northeastern states of Assam and Nagaland were shut down as students called a strike to protest against escalating violence between ethnic Assamese and Hindi speaking people in the region.

## US, S Korea ask DPRK to scrap nukes

AFP, Seoul

The defense chiefs of the United States and South Korea urged North Korea yesterday to dismantle its nuclear weapons drive in a verifiable and irreversible manner.

They warned that any North Korean use of weapons of mass destruction would have the "gravest consequences."

The warning was included in a joint communique from US Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld and South Korean Defense Minister Cho Young-Kil following annual security talks here.

"The secretary and the minister called on North Korea to completely, verifiably and irreversibly dismantle its nuclear weapons programs and to cease the testing, development and export of weapons of mass destruction, missiles and related technologies," the

communique said.

The two emphasized that North Korea's continued development of weapons of mass destruction and long-range missiles, along with the danger of exporting those weapons and technologies, were "causes of significant concern for the alliance and the international community."

The two agreed to maintain a strong combined defensive capability to deter North Korean threats, and Rumsfeld reaffirmed the US commitment to the continued provision of a nuclear umbrella for South Korea.

At a meeting with Roh later in the day, Rumsfeld welcomed Seoul's decision to send 3,000 more troops to Iraq and reaffirmed the US pledge to maintain a strong military presence in South Korea as a deterrent to the North, Roh's aides said.

## Security net drapes London on eve of Bush's state visit

AFP, London

Intensive security measures fell into place in London yesterday on the eve of a state visit to Britain by US President George W. Bush that could flesh out the future of post-war Iraq.

Extra police were deployed at Britain's ferry ports and airports, and passengers were being checked as they came off Eurostar trains from mainland Europe, ahead of Bush's arrival Tuesday evening.

Police were meanwhile in talks with the Stop the War Coalition, which is insisting on leading a big protest march Thursday against Bush and the Iraq war past Downing Street to parliament.

Large-scale demonstrations, and a heightened terrorist alert, risk overshadowing talks that Bush will be having with Prime Minister Tony Blair on

winning the peace in Iraq.

In the latest of a series of pre-visit interviews with British media, Bush told the mass circulation Sun newspaper that he wouldn't be rattled by voices of dissent.

"Presidents and prime ministers should never worry about how they are viewed in short-term history," he said in the interview published Monday.

"I think in terms of long-term history, I set big goals. And I know what we're doing is going to have a positive effect on this world."

Bush and Blair were expected to review plans for an accelerated transfer of sovereignty in Iraq on June 30 next year, and how that could impact on a withdrawal of US, British and other occupation forces.

Bush -- whose chances for reelection in November next year could be

ruined if US casualties in Iraq keep growing -- welcomed the handover timetable Sunday, but warned: "It depends on what's taking place on the ground."

Bush and Blair were also expected to discuss ways to patch up Euro-American relations and head off a looming trade war over US tariffs on steel imports which have been deemed illegal by the World Trade Organisation.

Bush will be staying at Buckingham Palace as the personal guest of Queen Elizabeth II, in what the palace is calling the first-ever state visit to Britain by a US president.

His program includes a ceremonial palace welcome and a keynote speech on Wednesday, a press conference with Blair on Thursday, and a quick side trip Friday to Blair's constituency of Sedgefield, in northeast England.

## NE India paralysed by strike over conflict with Hindi speaking people

AFP, Guwahati

India's isolated northeastern states of Assam and Nagaland were shut down yesterday as students called a strike to protest escalating violence between ethnic Assamese and Hindi speakers in the region.

Businesses and schools were closed and roads were empty in much of Assam including the capital Guwahati in a 24-hour strike called to protest attacks on Assamese train passengers in the Hindi-speaking state of Bihar.

"All train services coming and going out of the state have been cancelled due to the strike," a police official said.

The strike, called by the All Assam Students' Union (AASU), was supported by Assam's main separatist rebel group, the United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA), which was among seven militant groups which Saturday threatened to attack Hindi-speaking people if they did not leave Assam.

Tensions have simmered for years between the local Assamese-speaking people and settlers from India's densely populated Ganges plain.

The rebels accuse speakers of north India's dominant language of altering the demographic balance and taking away jobs.

Two Hindi speakers were killed in attacks over the weekend in Assam with

dozens injured as Assamese militants opened fire, hurled grenades and torched homes and businesses run by the rival community.

The vigilante attacks came after unemployed young men in Bihar last week stormed five trains heading to Assam, beating and injuring at least 50 people.

The mobs were angry that youths in Assam had physically prevented candidates from Bihar from taking recruitment interviews for jobs at the state-run railways.

Sporadic violence was reported Monday with student picketers assaulting Hindi-speaking people and attacking some government buses.

"We have been getting reports of attacks on the Bihari community in Assam. Security forces have been deployed in strength across the state," the police official said.

Dimapur, the commercial hub of the insurgency-wracked neighbouring state of Nagaland, was also shut down after the Naga Students' Federation (NSF) supported the strike call.

"We are extending our full support to AASU's general strike call as many Naga people were also injured in the mob violence on trains in Bihar," NSF speaker V. Phushika Aomi told AFP by telephone from Dimapur.

## BSF battling Kashmir militants starts pullout

AFP, Srinagar

The main force battling militants in Indian Kashmir has started to pull out of the region's summer capital Srinagar to be replaced by lesser-trained police, officials said yesterday.

The Border Security Force (BSF), which has battled the rebellion since its outbreak in 1989, is being moved out of counter-insurgency operations as part of an Indian policy to reorient it as a dedicated border force.

"The pull-out has started and in the first phase BSF will move out from the areas north of the river Jehlum in Srinagar," a senior BSF officer told AFP.

"It will take us 15 to 20 more days to complete the first-phase pull-out from parts of Srinagar," he said.

As the BSF troops turn their focus on the volatile de facto border with Pakistan in Kashmir, the drive against rebels will be taken over by the Central Reserve Police Force.

Battalions of the federal police, once primarily a reserve force, have begun arriving in Srinagar, official sources said.

The BSF officer said the border force was handing over information to the federal police, "even the sources and informers".

"They will also be provided information about the militants present in the area and their sympathisers," he said.

The pull-out started despite appeals against it by the provincial government, which said the withdrawal of the BSF would set back operations at a time of surging violence.

Eight people died in the latest attacks.

Suspected rebels overnight shot dead ruling party member Mohammad Ismail after barging into his house in Laripora near Pahalgam, 100km south of Srinagar, police said.

Ismail was the seventh worker from a party supporting Indian rule -- and the fourth from the ruling People's Democratic Party -- to be killed since the government marked a year in power on November 2.

Three troops were killed, two of them in an overnight ambush in the southern Rajouri district, police said.

Suspected militants also killed four civilians including a Muslim man, Imtiaz Ahmed, who died in a grenade attack on his house in Inderwan village near Gandherbal, 35km northeast of Srinagar.

Ahmed's father, who escaped the attack, was head of the village.

Rebels have frequently targeted village chiefs in the course of the 14-year insurgency, which has left 39,500 people dead, according to official figures.

Separatists put the toll at between 80,000 and 100,000.

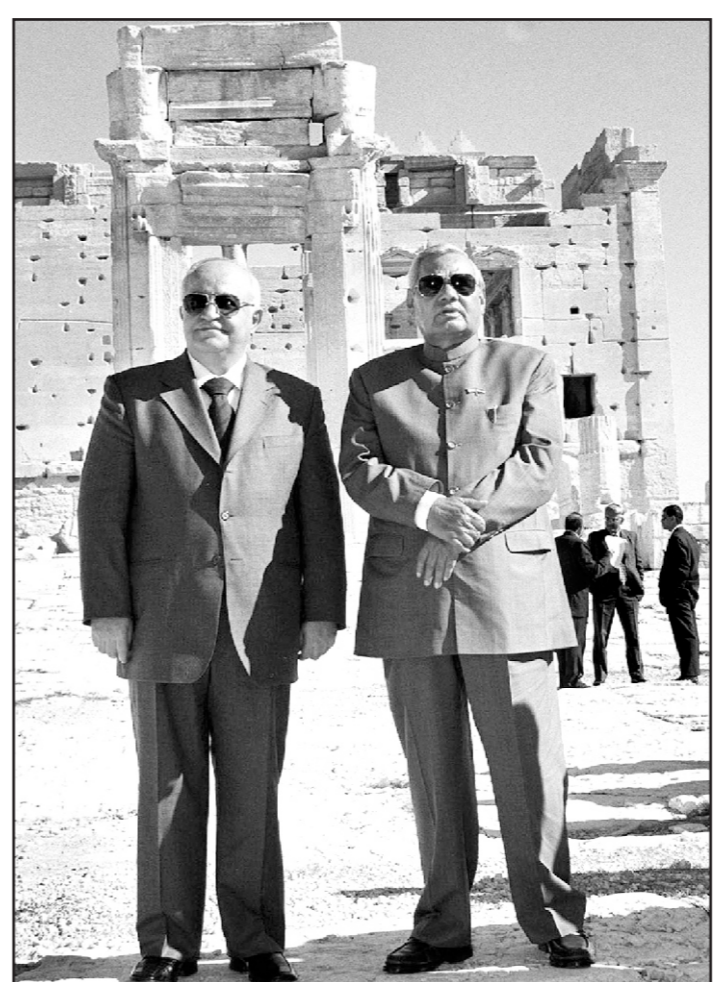


PHOTO: AFP  
Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee (R) poses with his Syrian counterpart Mohammad Najji Otri during a visit to the historic city of Palmayra, some 200km northeast of Damascus on Sunday. India and Syria want the United Nations to play a major role in Iraq where the priority must be to restore security, said a joint statement Sunday to mark the departure of Indian premier Atal Behari Vajpayee.