

Brits warned against travel to Istanbul

AFP, London

The Foreign Office warned British nationals against "all but the most essential" travel to Turkey's metropolis Istanbul following bomb attacks there Thursday against British interests.

"We advise against all but the most essential travel to Istanbul, until the situation becomes clearer," the Foreign Office said, updating its travel advice for the country.

"We urge you to be vigilant in all parts of the country," the Foreign Office advice said, calling for particular care to be taken around potential terrorist targets such as tourist sites and areas where foreigners gather.

The warning came just days after suicide bombings on two synagogues in Istanbul killed 23 people and wounded more than 300, and after a string of other violent incidents.

Explosions have rocked British diplomatic missions and the HSBC bank in Turkey at least three times earlier this year, though none were nearly as deadly or powerful as those Thursday in Istanbul.

Rioters burn 13 churches in Nigeria

REUTERS, Lagos

Islamic militants burned to the ground thirteen churches and several houses in a remote northern Nigerian town after a Christian student was accused of blasphemy, police said yesterday.

Irate youths torched churches, houses and shops late on Tuesday in Kazaure, some 50 miles north of Kano, a northern provincial capital where hundreds have died in religious clashes in the past three years.

The dispute began when a Christian student was accused of insulting the Prophet Mohammad and a group of Muslims were not satisfied with the response of school authorities.

Abubakar Sale, police commissioner in the northern Jigawa state, told Reuters that the rioters attempted to invade the school but were repelled by police.

"The hoodlums then mobilized and went into town where they started looting and burning people's property," Sale said by phone from Dutse, the state capital.

CIA widens probe of Iraq intelligence

REUTERS, Washington

The Central Intelligence Agency's internal probe of prewar Iraq intelligence has been expanded to consider whether the agency missed signs that Baghdad had scrapped its weapons of mass destruction before the US-led invasion last March, USA Today reported yesterday.

On orders from CIA Director George Tenet, the probe was widened this week to examine 20 volumes of raw intelligence data, including electronic intercepts, spy satellite photos and reports from human sources, the newspaper reported.

Before the probe was broadened, the four-member team of former CIA analysts examining prewar intelligence since early this year had limited its work to fewer volumes of finished intelligence reports and assessments, according to the newspaper.

The expanded probe was disclosed by two intelligence officials who asked not to be named and was confirmed by Richard Kerr, a former CIA deputy director and head of the four-member team, USA Today reported.

Bush meets families of British troops killed in Iraq

REUTERS, London

President Bush held a rare meeting in London yesterday with families of troops killed in Iraq and Afghanistan, telling British relatives that their loved ones had not died in vain.

Bush, on a high-profile state visit to Britain that has been accompanied by a number of protests, spoke to the families for about 20 minutes at the historic Westminster Abbey.

"The president wanted to meet with them to express the condolences of the people of the United States and the president and Mrs. Bush," a U.S. official said.

"Also to express to them that their loved ones died serving something greater than themselves, and didn't die in vain."

About 15 relatives of seven members of the armed forces killed in Iraq and Afghanistan met the president. The meeting had been billed as one of the centerpieces of Bush's visit to Britain, his main ally in the war in Iraq.

World leaders outraged at latest Istanbul blasts

AFP, Paris

World leaders quickly condemned yesterday's bloody suicide bombings in Istanbul, the second set in less than a week, as a "barbaric" bid to destabilize order, warning it would only strengthen resolve in the fight on terrorism.

US President George W. Bush, clearly outraged as he stood alongside British Prime Minister Tony Blair on his state visit to Britain, vowed to crush global terrorists who "hate freedom".

"They hate freedom. They hate free countries," a grim-faced Bush said at a Downing Street press conference following the massive bombings that targeted two British interests.

Blair said: "There must be no holding back, no compromise, no hesitation in confronting this menace

(of terrorism), in attacking it wherever and whenever we can and in defeating it completely."

Turkey's Foreign Minister Abdullah Gul deplored the loss of life but vowed the country would not bow to such tactics.

"Unfortunately again we lost so many innocent people but we'll continue to fight against terrorism," Gul said during a visit to Stockholm.

The European Commission blasted the loss of innocent lives by such "evil deeds".

In Strasbourg, the European Parliament halted a full session to observe a minute of silence.

Assembly president Pat Cox expressed on behalf of the parliament "our profound sympathy and condolences to the victims and their fami-

lies, and our solidarity with the Turkish authorities in getting to the root of the problem of dealing with perpetrators of this terror."

Walter Schwimmer, the secretary general of the Council of Europe group of democratic states that has sought to set up a European convention on terrorism, condemned the blasts in EU-hopeful Turkey -- a state thrown into the forefront of post-September 11 politics as NATO's only mainly Muslim member on the bloc's volatile southern flank next to Iraq.

Italy's Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi, whose country holds the rotating EU presidency, condemned the "savagely" attacks, saying: "The strategy of hate and intimidation will not prevail and will not succeed in distracting Turkey from its objective of

being part of the European Union."

In Paris, a spokeswoman for French President Jacques Chirac said he "condemns in the strongest terms" the two attacks and "will pass on his emotion and solidarity directly by letter to Turkish President Ahmet Necdet Sezer as well as to British Prime Minister Tony Blair."

Prime Minister Costas Simitis of Greece, Turkey's neighbor, said the blasts resulted from "blind politics", though he did not elaborate.

In Poland, foreign ministry spokesman Boguslaw Majewski said "our pain is even greater as the number of victims is growing by the minute."

Britain's Foreign Office meanwhile warned its citizens against "all but the most essential travel to Istanbul, until the situation becomes clearer."



PHOTO: AFP

Britain's Queen Elizabeth II arrives with US President George W. Bush on Wednesday for the Buckingham Palace state banquet in honour of the US President, during the first day of his four-day state visit to the UK where the Queen told President George Bush that Britain and the US stood firm in their determination to defeat terrorism.

Bush, Queen hail strong US-British ties

AFP, London

US President George Bush and Queen Elizabeth II congratulated each other on the long-standing ties that link their countries at a lavish state dinner Wednesday at Buckingham Palace.

"Our troops have served together in Afghanistan and Iraq to lead the fight for freedom and democracy," said the queen as she toasted the president who sat next to her at the top table in the Palace Ballroom.

"Like all special friends, we can talk frankly and disagree from time to time," she added.

Among the 170 invited guests were politicians, led by Prime Minister Tony Blair, and diplomats, including the ambassadors of Kuwait and Italy, allies with Britain and the United States in the Iraq war.

Bush, who has given up alcohol and merely raised his glass of champagne but did not drink from it during the toast, joked that relations between Britain and the United States "did not start out too well."

"But even in America's founding our nations shared a basic belief in human liberty. And in time our shared commitment to freedom became the basis of a great Atlantic alliance that defeated tyranny in Europe and saved the liberty of the world."

After the toasts, the dinner guests tucked into chicken and cabbage to the sound of bagpipes and Broadway musicals.

Some 13 senior members of the royal family were present, along with members of Bush's entourage such as Secretary of State Colin Powell and US national security adviser Condoleezza Rice.

Seated at the top table with the queen and Prince Philip were the president and First Lady Laura Bush, Prince Charles, Princess Anne, Powell and his wife, Blair, Rice and the Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams.

A high-profile British guest with business links to the United States was Virgin Atlantic airline tycoon Sir Richard Branson.

On the menu, written in French, was consommé with sorrel, roast halibut with herbs, breast of chicken with basil, roast potatoes, Savoy cabbage and salad, followed by vanilla praline and coffee ice cream.

Five wines, including vintage champagne, were being served.

The banquet was being held in the Palace Ballroom, the largest of the state rooms at Buckingham Palace. It was opened in 1856 with a ball to celebrate the end of the Crimean War.

At the east end of the grandly appointed room is a Musicians' Gallery where a military orchestra of the Scots Guards played a selection of music during the banquet.

The programme included tunes from "South Pacific", the "Band of Brothers" theme, "Greensleeves", "Fiddler On The Roof", "The Blue Bells of Scotland" and "O Sole Mio".



PHOTO: AFP

Picture shows debris outside the British consulate (L) in Istanbul hit by a series of explosions yesterday. Two annexes fronting the British consulate in Istanbul were destroyed by at least one explosion, an AFP correspondent on the scene said and at least 25 people were reported dead according to the state Anatolia agency.

3 countries identified as possible suppliers of Iran's nuke tech

Iran must be cited for good & bad: ElBaradei

AP, Vienna

The International Atomic Energy Agency has identified Russia, China and Pakistan as probable suppliers of some of the technology Iran used to enrich uranium as part of its suspect nuclear programs, diplomats said yesterday.

The diplomats spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity, as a key IAEA board meeting discussed how to react to Iran's nuclear activities. While Iran has acknowledged nearly two decades of concealment, it has recently begun cooperating with the agency in response to international pressure.

As part of that cooperation it has suspended uranium enrichment an activity that the United States had linked to what it says was Iran's nuclear weapons agenda. Iran insists it enriched uranium only to produce power. While acknowledging that some of its enrichment equipment had traces of weapons-grade highly

enriched uranium, it insists those traces were inadvertently imported on material it purchased abroad.

Iran has said it cannot identify the countries of origin because it bought the centrifuges and laser enrichment equipment through third parties. The IAEA needs to establish where the equipment came from, however, to be able to compare isotope traces in its efforts to verify whether Iran is telling the truth about the source of the traces or whether it enriched uranium to nuclear weapons levels domestically.

The diplomats declined to say how the agency established the probable origin of the equipment. Reacting to earlier reports linking it to Iran's enrichment program, Pakistan has denied all involvement.

In recent interviews, IAEA Director General Mohamed ElBaradei has said that five countries and companies in Asia and Europe are the source of the enrichment equipment.

The revelations came amid intense discussions by the IAEA on a "quite

strong" resolution on Iran's past covert nuclear activities that also acknowledges its recent cooperation, said ElBaradei.

Meanwhile, Iran must be cited for violating nuclear non-proliferation agreements but credit must be given for the new page it has turned on cooperating with international inspectors, the head of the UN nuclear watchdogs said Thursday.

Mohamed ElBaradei was speaking to reporters as a meeting opened in Vienna of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)'s 35-nation board of governors to consider how to react to two decades of covert nuclear activities by Iran.

The United States charges that Iran is secretly trying to develop nuclear weapons. It wants the IAEA to declare Tehran in non-compliance with the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), which would bring the issue before the United Nations Security Council, which could impose sanctions.

Israel defiant over barrier after Bush criticism

REUTERS, Jerusalem

Israel responded defiantly yesterday to sharp criticism by President Bush of a barrier it is building through Palestinian areas in the West Bank.

Israeli Vice Premier Ehud Olmert said the barrier would remain an option even if a Middle East peace process resumed.

"Israel will always have the right to take unilateral steps for separation from the Palestinians through a fence or other means," Olmert told Israel Radio.

In a speech in London on Wednesday, Bush toughened his stance over the barrier, saying Israel must not prejudice final peace negotiations "with the placement of walls and fences."

Israel says the barrier of concrete walls, ditches, trenches, roads, razor wire and electric fences is aimed at stopping suicide bombers from reaching its cities. Palestinians accuse Israel of trying to secure land it occupied in 1967.

Israel's biggest newspaper reported Egypt has proposed an eight-step plan for an Israeli-Palestinian cease-fire that would begin no later than December 15 and lead to peace talks.

The Yedioth Ahronot daily said it obtained the plan after Egyptian intelligence officials presented it earlier this week to Israel and the Palestinians. There was no immediate comment from the two sides.

Under the reported plan, Israeli-Palestinian talks to implement a

U.S.-backed peace "road map" stalled by violence would be renewed immediately after the cease-fire began.

Israel would pledge to stop "assassinations" of militants, pull troops out of West Bank cities and halt all military operations against Palestinians, the newspaper said. The Palestinian Authority would agree to prevent "terror attacks." The report said the United States and the three other sponsors of the road map -- Russia, the European Union and the United Nations -- would guarantee implementation of the cease-fire to end three years of violence.

Egypt is trying to broker truce talks between militants and the Palestinian Authority.

Anti-Bush protest at palace gate

AFP, London

Several hundred demonstrators gathered at the front gates of Buckingham Palace on Wednesday to jeer US President George W. Bush on the first full day of his state visit to Britain.

As night fell, the crowd waved anti-Bush banners, flags and an effigy of the president in a Texas cowboy hat.

They were carefully watched by police, who arrested 31 people. The authorities are mounting huge security during the president's visit amid fears of an attack by Islamic extremists.

Protesters burned the US flag near Buckingham Palace, where the president is staying as a guest of Queen Elizabeth II, underlining feelings of animosity toward Bush, even though there were no serious incidents or violence.



PHOTO: AFP

Protesters wave anti-Bush placards in front of Buckingham Palace in London Wednesday. Bush is on a four-day state visit to Britain and is expected to be met by some 100,000 protesters.

Jackson faces deadline to surrender

BBC ONLINE

Police have ordered pop star Michael Jackson to give himself up and face an arrest warrant and multiple charges of child abuse.

The singer has been set an undisclosed deadline to turn himself in to Santa Barbara police in California.

There are reports that he is in Las Vegas and will meet police on Thursday, two days after his Neverland ranch was raided by officers.

Mr Jackson's spokesman called the allegations "scurrilous and unfounded".

"The outrageous allegations against Michael Jackson are false. Michael would never harm a child in any way," the spokesman, Stuart Backerman, said.

They would be proved false in a court of law, he said. Santa Barbara sheriff Jim Anderson confirmed the warrant had been issued, saying: "We encourage him to turn himself in."

Bail has been set at \$3m (£1.75m), he said.



PHOTO: AFP

Jenna Curry (L) and Sam Peiris, of Las Vegas, Nevada, hold placards supporting popstar Michael Jackson outside of the CMX studios, where Jackson is recording a music video Wednesday in Las Vegas, Nevada. Jackson was ordered to surrender to police to face multiple counts of child molestation.

Iraqis say Saddam not leading attacks

AP, Samara

A former Iraqi general who claims to be part of the insurgency against US troops says the guerrilla war around this "Sunni Triangle" city is being waged by small groups fighting on their own without direction from Saddam Hussein or others.

He and two other Samara men, who said they are in separate guerrilla units, insisted in interviews with The Associated Press that their fight isn't aimed at returning Saddam to power. They said it's about ending the US-led occupation and restoring Iraqi rule.

"I am fighting for my country not Saddam Hussein to get rid of the infidels. Very few people are fighting for him. They gave up on him at the end of the war," said one of the men, an unemployed electrical engineer.

Despite the Bush administration's statement that it wants to turn over sovereignty by next June and eventually withdraw its troops, the men said they believe the Americans are here to

pillage Iraq and steal its oil.

All three said their guerrilla groups are fighting without instructions from Saddam or any other contact with Iraq's former leader. They also said there is no shortage of potential fighters among Iraqi males, most of whom have at least rudimentary military training from compulsory army service during Saddam's rule.

The men, who described themselves as loyalists of the ousted Baath ruling party, were interviewed separately last week. They agreed to discuss the fighting around Samara only if they were not identified, to avoid making their targets of US troops.

Their claims to be active in guerrilla operations could not be independently confirmed, but there was some indirect evidence that supported their accounts. Without providing details on a site or timing, the engineer said a bomb had been planted on a nearby railway in preparation for attacking a train; three days later, on Saturday, an explosion derailed a train causing

damage but no injuries.

The men also gave details of other planned attacks, but AP was unable to confirm whether they occurred. Lt. Col. Ryan Gonsalves, the senior US officer in Samara, declined to comment on that question Wednesday, saying he did not necessarily know about every attack in the area.

The former general, whose 30 years of military service under Saddam is well known in this city of 250,000 people, said he is mostly involved in planning attacks and giving advice on weapons. The other men the engineer and a wholesaler said they participate in attacks.

The general described the guerrillas as long on enthusiasm and commitment but short on training and organization, and he said they do not coordinate their activities. Nevertheless, they can cause trouble for US troops, he argued, because the Americans go about in small units that are easier to attack.