

## Iraq invites arms inspectors

### US likely to attack Baghdad, Australian PM warns

AP, AFP, United Nations

Facing an increasing possibility of U.S. military action, Iraq gave the first solid indication in nearly four years that it will allow UN weapons inspectors to return and invited the chief inspector to Baghdad for talks.

The return of inspectors is a key demand of the UN Security Council and especially of the United States, which has accused Iraq of trying to rebuild its banned weapons programs and of supporting terrorism.

In a surprise move, Iraq's Foreign Minister Najib Sabri sent a letter to Secretary-General Kofi Annan on Thursday referring twice to the return of inspectors and hinting that talks with chief inspector Hans Blix could lead to an agreement for a resumption of inspections.

There was no immediate comment on the Iraqi proposal from UN or U.S. officials.

The letter arrived four weeks after Annan failed for the third time since March to persuade Sabri to allow the inspectors back. Unlike many Iraqi letters to the United Nations, this one was moderate in tone and did not contain political

rhetoric.

It was sent on a day the Senate Foreign Relations Committee wrapped up hearings on whether the United States should force Iraqi President Saddam Hussein from power. It was generally agreed at the Senate hearings that Saddam's development of weapons of mass destruction pose a serious risk though there have been differences about whether the threat could be ended only by military action.

While President Bush called for Saddam to be removed, citing the threat posed by Iraq's development of chemical and biological weapons and its pursuit of nuclear weapons, administration officials insist no decision has been made on whether to invade Iraq.

Nonetheless, there has been an increasing spate of media reports that Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld is examining military options.

The letter also arrived on the day the United States assumed the rotating presidency of the Security Council.

Under UN Security Council resolutions, sanctions imposed after the invasion can be lifted only

when inspectors certify that Iraq's nuclear, chemical and biological weapons have been destroyed, along with the long-range missiles that could deliver them. The United States has warned Saddam he faces unspecified consequences if he does not allow the return of the inspectors, who left ahead of 1998 allied airstrikes meant to punish Iraq for blocking inspections.

In the letter, Sabri invited Blix and experts from the UN weapons inspection agency to visit Baghdad for technical talks "at the earliest agreed upon time."

Sabri said his government wants the talks between Blix and Iraqi experts to review the remaining questions about Iraq's weapons programs and decide measures to resolve them "when the inspection regime returns to Iraq."

The Iraqi minister said the meeting would follow-up on Annan's suggestion in August 1998 "to conduct a comprehensive review ... and assess the degree of Iraq's implementation of its obligations."

"We believe that this review will be an important step towards the appropriate legal and technical assessment and treatment of the

issues of disarmament and to establish a solid base for the next stage of monitoring and inspection activities..." he said.

In a report in January 1999, a month after inspectors were withdrawn, the UN inspection agency issued a report on the status of disarmament.

AFP adds: Australian Prime Minister John Howard warned Friday that the United States was likely to attack Iraq and Australia would probably be asked to join in.

He also acknowledged that there could be a price to pay but said the threat posed by Iraq should not be allowed to go unchecked.

Canberra was conscious that involvement with the United States could produce negative consequences, Howard said.

He did not spell out what those consequences could be, although Iraq has already threatened to halve its Australian wheat imports because of earlier statements in support of a pre-emptive US strike aimed at toppling President Saddam Hussein's regime.



PHOTO: AFP  
Palestinian boys look on as smoke rises from the demolished two-storey home of Hatem Shuweiki, an Islamic Jihad militant, after it was destroyed by the Israeli army early Friday in the West Bank town of Hebron. Shuweiki had carried out a shooting attack at Jerusalem's French Hill junction over a year ago in which two Israelis were killed. The Israeli army demolished the house as a deterrent to other would be attackers.

## N Korea offers military talks with UN over naval clash

AFP, Seoul

North Korea on Friday offered to hold military talks next week with the US-led United Nations Command (UNC) over a recent inter-Korean naval gunbattle, UN military officials said.

The North's surprise proposal was for talks between military generals on August 6 at the inter-Korean border village of Panmunjom, they said.

Lieutenant General Ri Chan-Bok, the North's army representative at the village, said in a telegram message to Major General James Soligan, UNC deputy chief of staff, that the naval clash can be discussed.

## US gives Indonesia \$ 50m to combat terror groups

AFP, Jakarta

The United States on Friday pledged more than 50 million dollars to help Indonesia combat terrorism in an effort to boost its war on extremist violence in Southeast Asia.

US Secretary of State Colin Powell also said Washington was prepared to expand military cooperation with Jakarta, nearly three years after most military ties were broken off over the army-backed militia violence in East Timor.

The sum includes four million dollars in counter-terrorism training for military officials. But Powell warned that a restoration of full military ties depends on the armed forces improving its human rights record.

## Kashmir polls set for Sept

AFP, New Delhi

India announced Friday that elections in Kashmir would be held in four stages from September 16 but the threat of boycotts and violence immediately loomed large.

Separatists in the disputed Himalayan state again rejected the vote and Islamic rebels lobbed a grenade to make their displeasure known.

Voting for the 87-member Kashmir assembly will take place on September 16, September 24, October 1 and October 8. Vote-counting will begin October 10 with

results due two days later, chief electoral commissioner James Lyngdoh announced.

The term of the present assembly is due to expire on October 17.

"We have been taking this election more seriously than we have taken any election in India in the past," Lyngdoh told a press conference in New Delhi.

India is hoping for a smooth vote in the rebellion-wracked region in a bid to deflect complaints by Kashmiris that they have not been allowed to choose their own leaders.

But minutes after the dates were announced, suspected rebels

hurled a grenade at the office of India's main opposition Congress party in Kashmir's summer capital Srinagar. No one was injured.

Islamic militants fighting to end Indian rule in Kashmir have vowed to disrupt the polls.

Mainstream separatists, who have seen some of their key leaders arrested in recent months, plan to boycott the vote.

"We believe in election politics, but there should have been a dialogue with us over the Kashmir issue before announcing the polls," leading separatist Shabir Shah told AFP in Srinagar.

## Israeli tanks sweep into Nablus

### PA warns against new explosion of violence

REUTERS, AFP, Nablus/ Gaza City

Israeli troops backed by more than 100 tanks poured into the centre of the West Bank city of Nablus on Friday, killing three Palestinians as Israel hit back for a Jerusalem university bombing in which seven died.

The Israeli army said it was launching a mission to root out a "local terror network" just two days after the militant Palestinian group Hamas detonated a bomb in a cafeteria at Hebrew University, killing five Americans and two Israelis.

The bodies of two of the Americans were being flown home on Friday as the FBI launched an investigation into the attack, which drew words of outrage from President Bush.

The American deaths seemed certain to complicate U.S. attempts to calm a conflict raging for more than 22 months.

Hamas, dedicated to Israel's destruction, said Wednesday's bombing was part of its revenge for a Gaza air raid last week that killed its military commander, his lieutenant and 13 other Palestinians,

including nine children.

After vowing harsh retaliation against Hamas, Israel sent columns of tanks deep into the heart of Palestinian-ruled Nablus, which had been surrounded and under curfew for weeks.

Troops exchanged fire with gunmen as they assaulted their main target, the Casbah, or Old City, a warren of alleyways where militants holed up and fought fiercely during a month-long Israeli offensive in the West Bank last spring.

"Our objective is to eliminate the local terror network, especially the

bomb factories we believe exist there," a senior Israeli officer said as the raid began under cover of darkness.

AFP adds: The Palestinian Authority warned Friday that stepped up military action by Israel in the West Bank and Gaza Strip could lead to a new explosion of violence.

"The assassinations, the demolition of houses and the policy of expulsions can only lead to more violence", Nabil Abu Rudeina, a top adviser to Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat, told AFP.



PHOTO: AFP  
A flood victim (L) waits in line to receive medical care for her son who has contracted a viral fever at a makeshift Red Cross medical facility in Bheikar village in Assam on Friday. More than a month of high floods have left up to five million people homeless and 41 dead in Assam state.

## 50 killed in Afghan fighting

REUTERS, Islamabad

At least 50 soldiers and civilians were killed in a battle between ethnic Tajiks and Pashtuns in western Afghanistan on Thursday, an Afghan news agency quoted one of the factions as saying.

The Pakistan-based Afghan Islamic Press (AIP) said the Tajik-dominated forces of Governor Ismail Khan and forces loyal to local warlord Mohammad Kareem Khan fought a pitched battle near Ghurian, some 40 miles west of Herat city.

The AIP quoted a spokesman for the Pashtun warlord as saying the Tajik forces, backed by tanks, had attacked Pashtun positions.

He accused Ismail Khan's forces of torching the houses of Pashtuns and said many people were burned alive.

## French FM begins S Asia trip with talks in Delhi

AFP, New Delhi

French Foreign Minister Dominique de Villepin held talks in the Indian capital Friday on co-operating with New Delhi in the fight against terrorism.

His trip to South Asia, which also includes a visit to Pakistan, is aimed at strengthening ties between France and the two nuclear-armed countries.

"We reaffirmed our common determination to continue the fight against terrorism within the bilateral framework between India and France and within the United Nations," de Villepin said after meeting with Deputy Prime Minister Lal Krishna Advani.

## Pakistan backs Lanka in its civil war

PTI, Colombo

Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf on Thursday pledged his country's continued moral and material support to Sri Lanka in preserving its unity and lauded the role of the army during the nearly two-decade old civil war.

"We pray for the return of peace and stability to Sri Lanka, and at the same time, will continue to always give our moral, political, diplomatic and material support to Sri Lanka at all times," Musharraf who is here on a day-long visit said.

Complimenting the island's armed forces, the military ruler told reporters here, "They have been sustaining their operations for nearly 20 years. I know the pressure and I want to give full credit to them."

## Musharraf, Jiang utter their interest in S Asian peace

AFP, Beijing

Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf and his Chinese counterpart Jiang Zemin declared their interest in peace in the troubled South Asian region as they met Friday, diplomats and media said.

Talks between the two leaders addressing Pakistan's tortured relations with India took place at the end of a 10-hour visit by Musharraf to the Chinese capital, according to a Pakistani diplomat.

"China supports all efforts to alleviate the tension between Pakistan and India and to safeguard peace and stability in South Asia," Jiang was quoted by China's official Xinhua news agency as telling Musharraf.

Musharraf responded that

Pakistan did not want to be involved in a war and would not start a war, pledging Pakistan would "do its best to realise regional peace and stability," Xinhua reported.

After the talks ended shortly before noon, Musharraf left Beijing for home, a Chinese foreign ministry official said.

Musharraf had arrived in China, a long-standing ally, late Friday after visits to Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, which he denied were intended to drum up support for Pakistan.

The tour came with India and Pakistan engaged in a tense stand-off over the activities of Islamic militants in India's part of the disputed Himalayan region of Kashmir.

India has long accused Pakistan of sponsoring militants fighting against its rule in Kashmir.

Indian authorities announced Friday that elections in Kashmir

would be held in four stages from September 16, in a vote that separatists say they will boycott and militants have vowed to disrupt.

Against this background, a brief stopover in China was well worth the effort for Musharraf, according to analysts.

"A gesture of this kind tends to enhance Pakistani bargaining power," said Joseph Cheng, a China watcher at the City University of Hong Kong.

"Pakistan is simply telling India and the world that it has the support of China," he said.

Cheng said the meeting was also worthwhile for Jiang, who took time off from annual informal leadership meetings at the Chinese seaside resort of Beidaihe.

"China signals its support for Pakistan without committing too much," the analyst said.

China, which itself controls a small part of Kashmir, is keen to avoid conflict between Pakistan and India, two nuclear-armed powers on its South Asian doorstep.

It was the third time Musharraf had visited China since late last year, with the US-led war on terrorism also emerging as a major issue since Pakistan became a crucial ally of Washington.

"The tensions between India and Pakistan are obviously the most important reason (for Musharraf's frequent visits)," said Cheng.

"But Musharraf would also like to show his independence from the United States, and wants to balance his support for the United States with wider ties to other countries," he said.



PHOTO: AFP  
Lebanese Dorisse Hajj, Miss Internet World 2002, poses for a picture on Wednesday in Beirut. Hajj was elected Miss Internet in Turkey on July 22 in a competition with 33 competitors.

## Musharraf has no plan to quit

PTI, Colombo

Dismissing any possibility of demitting office or contesting elections ever, visiting Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf on Thursday said all executive power would be transferred to the Prime Minister appointed after the general elections in October this year.

"Real power will be with the Prime Minister. I'm going to shed that power and real executive authority to run the Government and take decisions will vest with the Prime Minister," he told a select

group of journalists here.

"I am a strong believer in unity of command. No organisation, whether it is a corporate or a Government, can function with duality of power," Musharraf said.

Asked if he would bow out, the military ruler replied in the negative, saying: "I think I have a role to play in bringing democracy to Pakistan. It may sound odd, a man in uniform saying he will bring democracy, but we have never had democracy in Pakistan, but only elected governments, that's all."

"He, however, said there would

be "checks and balances" in the form of the President's office. "This check is essential and will be with the President, anybody who holds that office in future.

Nobody should grudge this. While all authority would be with the Prime Minister and the Cabinet, the power to ensure it was governed well and without corruption would be with the President," he said.

Musharraf justified such a power in the hands of the President on the ground that every country should have its form of democracy tailored to suit its typical environment.



PHOTO: AFP  
Filipino protestors stage an anti-US rally outside the US embassy hours before the visit of US Secretary of State Colin Powell in Manila on Friday. Powell is due to meet Philippine President Gloria Arroyo following the successful six months US counter terrorism mission in the southern Philippines.

## Rumsfeld wants more covert action to fight al-Qaida

REUTERS, Washington

Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld has ordered an acceleration in covert missions in the U.S.-led war on terrorism because he is impatient with the pace at which al-Qaida fighters are being captured or killed, The Washington Times reported Friday.

In response, U.S. Special Operations Command chief Gen. Charles Holland has drafted an initial plan calling for operations that

could be launched quickly and outside restrictions of traditional law enforcement, the report said.

"Rumsfeld wants to stay as far away from law enforcement as possible" one source told the paper, adding that the defence secretary wanted "new thinking."

Three administration sources told the paper Rumsfeld was not happy at the rate at which al-Qaida and Taliban fighters were being found and eliminated.

In recent weeks, Rumsfeld

asked Holland and other senior military officials to devise a new plan for attacking terrorist cells around the world, primarily using covert forces, The Times said, citing administration officials.

Holland was expected to brief Rumsfeld on the new plan for going after enemy forces soon, perhaps as early as Friday, the newspaper said, adding that the plan ultimately must be approved by President Bush.